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THE LIVING CHRIST AND THE FOUR GOSPELS

THE LIVING CHRIST AND THE FOUR GOSPELS

By R. W. DALE LL.D
Birmingham

Fourteenth Edition, in Two Volumes

VOL. I

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Preface

THE Lectures printed in this volume were delivered to the Carrs' Lane Congregation, at irregular intervals, during the winter and early summer of the present year; the five first and the last on Sunday mornings, and the rest at the usual Thursday evening service.

For whom were they intended?

Eleven or twelve years ago I was preaching at Augustine Church, Edinburgh, a few months after Dr. Lindsay Alexander, a scholar and theologian of distinction, had resigned the pastorate. As I walked home with one of the deacons after the morning's service, he said some very gracious things, which I

have unhappily forgotten, about the sermon; he also said some things, not so gracious, about the ministers who had served the Church since Dr. Alexander's resignation; these, owing to some unamiable intellectual peculiarity, I remember. "Sir," he said, "they have preached to us as if we were all Masters of Arts." That was an error which I was not capable of committing, and therefore I deserved no credit for avoiding it. For if a preacher does something to form the habits of his people, the people do almost as much to form the habits of the preacher; and for thirty-seven years I have been the minister of a congregation in the heart of a great manufacturing community—a congregation in which there are never many Masters of Arts, although there are in it many men and women with an active, vigorous, and speculative intellect, and with a keen interest in public affairs and in current theological contro-

versies. For such persons the Lectures were prepared, and they are published with the hope that they may be of service to persons of the same description in other parts of England.

In delivering the Lectures to a popular audience, it was necessary to repeat in several of the later Lectures some things which had been said in the earlier. These repetitions are unnecessary in a printed book, but I have not found it possible to cancel them without reconstructing the whole argument.

To those of my readers who may wish to see the question of the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels treated with greater fulness, I recommend Professor Salmon's *Introduction to the New Testament*, Dr. Westcott's *History of the New Testament Canon*, Dr. Lightfoot's *Essays on the Work entitled "Supernatural Religion,"* Dr. Wace's *The Gospel and its Witnesses*, Professor Sanday's

The Gospels in the Second Century, and *The Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief*, by my friend Dr. Fisher, of Yale (U.S.), to all of which books I gratefully acknowledge my own obligations.

R. W. DALE.

LLANBEDR,
August, 1890.

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LECTURE I

THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE

I

THERE are large numbers of people who suppose that modern Science and modern Criticism have destroyed the foundations of Faith, and who cannot understand how it is possible, in these days, for intelligent, open-minded, educated men to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It may perhaps be well for us to remember that more than a hundred and fifty years ago there were large numbers of people of precisely the same mind. They believed that, as the result of the great changes which had passed upon the intellectual life of Europe since the Revival of Learning, the Christian Faith was no longer credible, and that its power was finally broken. Butler, in the preface to his *Analogy*, published in 1736, says : " It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accord-

ingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

Throughout the seventeenth century an under-current of unbelief had been rapidly gathering strength in France, in Holland, in Germany, and in England. To check it Grotius had written his *De Veritate Religionis Christianæ*, Pascal had projected the great work, the fragments of which are preserved in his *Pensées*, and Richard Baxter, who, I think, was the earliest English writer on the "Evidences," had written his *Unreasonableness of Infidelity*, his *Reasons for the Christian Religion*, and his *More Reasons for the Christian Religion, and no Reason against it.* Towards the end of the century the hostile movement became so formidable, that Robert Boyle founded his famous lectureship for the maintenance and defence of the Faith against unbelief. The first of the lecturers was Richard Bentley, who, in 1692, discoursed on *The Folly of Atheism and what is now called Deism, even with Respect to the Present Life*—not a promising argument with which to meet those who contested the

supernatural origin of the Christian revelation. He was followed, year after year, by a succession of men, eminent in their time, and some of whom had extensive learning and great intellectual force; but the sentences which I have quoted from Butler show that, after the Boyle lecturers had been lecturing for more than forty years, the assailants of the Christian Faith claimed the victory. The confidence of unbelief was as high when Butler wrote in the early part of the eighteenth century as it is now at the end of the nineteenth.

Then came a great change; and within sixty years the writings and the very names of the English deists were almost forgotten; the ponderous folios in which the first generation of Boyle lecturers lay entombed in public libraries were rarely disturbed, and were covered with dust;[1] and the fires of a great religious revival were burning gloriously in

[1] "We too have had writers of that description, who made some noise in their day. At present they repose in lasting oblivion. Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through? Ask the booksellers of London what is become of all these lights of the world. In a few

every part of the country. Faith was triumphant.

Now again, as in Butler's time, "it is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry." The temper with which all but the coarsest and least cultivated of those who reject the Christian Faith regard it is happily very different from what it was in the last century. They do not "set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule"; they speak with respect, sometimes with pathetic regret, of the vanished illusions which once consoled the sorrows and sustained the courage, the hope, and the virtue of mankind; but still they take it for granted that, "among all people of discernment"—or, to use the current phrases, among all cultivated men who are familiar with the best and most advanced thought of our time—Christianity, as a religion claiming to have originated in Divine revelation, is a lost cause.

Their confidence is not, I think, as firm as it was ten or fifteen years ago; for they are beginning to discover that renewed and pro-

years their few successors will go to the family vault of 'all the Capulets.'"—Burke: *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. [1790.]

longed assaults on the Christian Faith—assaults from various quarters and sustained with great intellectual vigour and with all the resources both of the older learning and of the new sciences—have produced very little effect.

Fifty years ago, the discoveries of geology were supposed to be fatal to the inspiration of Moses; and it was contended that, if fatal to the inspiration of Moses, they must also be fatal to the claims of Christ as Son of God and Son of man, the Lord and the Saviour of the human race. The assailants of the Faith were sure that at last they were about to be victorious; among its defenders there was anxiety, anger, alarm. Ingenious theories were invented, illustrating the harmony between Genesis and geology; but plain men felt instinctively that they were very much too ingenious to be satisfactory. Since that time, Christian scholars have given themselves more seriously than before to the scientific investigation of the literature of ancient races; and they are coming to the conclusion that, when the true nature of the earlier books of the Old Testament is understood, the objections to their authority suggested by the discoveries of modern science

cease to be relevant. Meanwhile ordinary Christian people, who know very little about investigations of this kind, have frankly accepted all that the geologists have ascertained in relation to the antiquity of the earth and the antiquity of man; but their faith in Christ is undisturbed.

More recently, the conclusions of Mr. Darwin concerning the origin of species, and especially concerning the origin of man, created similar excitement. At first, and when the boldness and grandeur of his theories were very imperfectly apprehended, they provoked more resentment than apprehension; for they seemed to impeach the dignity of human nature. But the geological controversies had helped to discipline thoughtful Christian men to a new conception of the nature of Divine revelation and of the literature in which the revelation is preserved. As soon as it became apparent that the general conclusions of Mr. Darwin were sustained by the almost universal concurrence of the highest scientific opinion in Europe and America, most Christian people accepted them without hesitation—but with one necessary and reasonable reservation. It lies within the scope of the physical sciences to investigate the origin and history of the

physical organization of man; but their resources and methods are at fault when they attempt to investigate the origin and history of his ethical and spiritual life. By no process of development is the transition from mere necessity to freedom conceivable. The region of moral freedom, and of religious faith and hope, lies beyond the boundaries of the sciences that deal with a world of phenomena governed by fixed and unvarying laws. These distinctions however remain unknown to the immense majority of Christian people. They are assured that the highest scientific authorities are practically agreed in accepting the great outlines of Mr. Darwin's theory of the origin of species, and they are also assured that this theory is irreconcilable with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Through popular magazines, through newspapers, through a thousand channels, they are informed that the old beliefs concerning the creation of the heavens and the earth, and concerning the creation of man and the fall of man, are finally destroyed: but they still rely on Christ with their old confidence for the remission of sins; they still make His will the law of conduct; they still pray to Him for consolation in sorrow, for defence against

temptation, and for strength in duty; and they still hope, through Him, for a glorious immortality. They are sure that the foundations on which their faith is built are firm and unshaken.

Assaults of another kind have been made on the traditional Christian beliefs during the last fifty years. Attacks on the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels have taken a new form; and the theories of their origin maintained by Strauss and by Ferdinand Baur have been discussed with great vigour all over Europe. The learning and the industry and the splendid intellectual vigour of Baur have produced a great impression on theological scholars; but, if I may trust my own observation, neither the speculations of Strauss on the origin of the story of Christ, nor of Baur on the origin of the books of the New Testament have produced the general alarm that was created for a time by the discoveries of geology and their alleged conflict with the early chapters of Genesis, or by the theories of Mr. Darwin and their alleged conflict with the Christian conception of the origin and destiny of man. Forty or fifty years ago ordinary Christian people heard that an eminent German theologian had

written a great book to show that the story of Christ in the New Testament was as mythical as the story of Hercules; that the book had produced immense excitement in Germany, France, and Holland; and that it had been translated into several European languages. They listened with astonishment, many of them with a certain scornful amusement; but very few of them felt that this assault on the Christian Faith was at all formidable. Some years later they heard that another eminent German theologian was maintaining that most of the books of the New Testament were written in the second century, in the interests of conflicting parties in the Church, or to bring about a reconciliation between them; that they were the productions of unknown authors, who, to add to the authority of their writings, had attributed them to Paul and Peter and John and Luke; that, to use the rough language of plain men, they were deliberate forgeries. Most Christian people listened to this account of the Christian Scriptures with indignation, and dismissed it as wholly incredible. It did not disturb their faith.

Nor has modern criticism on the Jewish Scriptures produced any general and enduring

anxiety. The excitement which followed the appearance of the writings of Bishop Colenso, twenty or thirty years ago, soon passed over; and there is something very remarkable in the indifference with which at the present time the majority of Christian people regard the whole critical controversy concerning the Old Testament.

I do not mean that these successive assaults on traditional Christian beliefs—assaults in the name of Science, assaults in the name of Criticism—have had no disastrous results. There are many persons who are convinced that the ascertained conclusions of modern Science and of modern Criticism are destructive of the authority which has been attributed both to the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures, that the traditional opinions concerning the authorship and the dates of many of the books of the Old Testament are false; and that most of the writings contained in the New Testament are spurious. Or, if some of the extreme conclusions of the destructive criticism are not regarded as finally established, it is known that great names can be quoted for, as well as against, them. And as it is assumed that the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures are the foundations of

Christian faith, that we must believe in the genuineness and historical trustworthiness of these ancient books, and even in their inspiration, before we can believe in Christ, they argue that, until these discussions are finally closed in favour of the traditional opinions, faith in Christ is impossible. The controversies have not, in any large number of cases, destroyed faith *where faith already existed*; but where faith does not exist, they appear to very many persons to create an insuperable obstacle to faith.

To such persons, if they are serious and well informed, there is something perplexing in the persistency of the faith of the great majority of Christian believers. Among those who remain Christian there are men whose intellectual vigour, patience, and keenness are equal to their own; men who are their equals in general intellectual culture, and who know as much as they know about the currents of modern thought; candid men; men who are incorruptible in their loyalty to truth; men who have a due sense of the immense importance, in relation to the higher life of the human race, of the questions at issue: *How is it that the faith in Christ of such men is unshaken?*

This is the precise question which I propose to answer in the earlier lectures of the course which I begin this morning. It is not my primary intention to state the reasons why those who do not believe in Christ should believe in Him, but to explain *why it is that those who believe in Him continue to believe.* This explanation however ought to show that those are in error who suppose that present controversies on the authority of the Holy Scriptures make a firm and settled faith in Christ impossible.

II

The substance of my first answer to the question why it is that those who believe in Christ continue to believe, may be given in a single sentence : *Whatever may have been the original grounds of their faith, their faith has been verified in their own personal experience.*

They have trusted in Christ for certain great and wonderful things, and they have received great and wonderful things. They have not perhaps received precisely what they expected when their Christian life began, for the kingdom of heaven cannot be really known until a man has entered into it ; but what they have received assures them that

Christ is alive, that He is within reach, and that He is the Saviour and Lord of men.

That they have received these blessings in answer to their faith in Christ is a matter of personal consciousness. They know it as they know that fire burns.

Their experience varies. Some of them would say that they can recall acts of Christ in which His personal volition and His supernatural power were as definitely manifested as in any of the miracles recorded in the Four Gospels. They were struggling unsuccessfully with some evil temper—with envy, jealousy, personal ambition—and could not subdue it. They hated it; they hated themselves for being under its tyranny; but expel it they could not. If it seemed suppressed for a time, it returned; and returned with its malignant power increased rather than diminished. They scourged themselves with scorpions for yielding to it; still they yielded. In their despair they appealed to Christ; and in a moment the evil fires were quenched and they were never rekindled. These instantaneous deliverances are perhaps exceptional; but to those who can recall them they carry an irresistible conviction that the Living Christ has heard their cry and answered them.

The more ordinary experiences of the Christian life, though less striking, are not less conclusive. The proof that Christ has heard prayer is not always concentrated into a moment, but is more commonly spread over large tracts of time. Prayer is offered for an increase of moral strength in resisting temptation, or for the disappearance of reluctance in the discharge of duties which are distasteful, or for a more gracious and kindly temper, or for patience and courage in bearing trouble, or for self-control, or for relief from exhausting and fruitless anxiety; and the answer comes. It comes gradually, but still it comes. We had lost hope. It seemed as if all our moral vigour was dying down, and as if nothing could restore it. The tide was slowly ebbing, and we were powerless to recall the retreating waters: but after we prayed it ceased to ebb; for a time it seemed stationary; then it began to flow; and though with many of us it has never reached the flood, the wholesome waters have renewed the energy and the joy of life.

Or we prayed to Christ to liberate us from some evil habit. The chains did not fall away at His touch, like the chains of Peter at the touch of the angel; but in some mysterious

way they were loosened, and at the same time we received accessions of strength. The old habit continued to trouble us; it still impeded our movements: but we could *move*; we recovered some measure of freedom, and were conscious that we were slaves no longer. There still remained a mechanical and automatic tendency to the evil ways of thinking, speaking, or acting; but we had become vigilant and alert, and were prompt to resist the tendency as soon as it began to work; and we were strong enough to master it. In the course of time the tendency became weaker and weaker, and at last, in some cases, it almost disappeared.

Some men have appealed to Christ when they have been seized with a great horror through the discovery of their *guilt*. It was not the awful penalty which menaces the impenitent that haunted and terrified them. Nor was their distress occasioned chiefly by the consciousness of moral evil. They feared the penalty, and they were humiliated and shamed by the contrast between ideal goodness and their own moral and spiritual life; but what stung and tortured them, sunk them into despair, filled heaven and earth with a darkness that could be felt, and made life

intolerable, was their *guilt*—guilt which they had incurred by their past sins, and which they continued to incur by their present sinfulness.

When once this sense of guilt fastens itself on a man, he cannot shake it off at will. The keen agony may gradually pass into a dull, dead pain; and after a time, the sensibility of the soul may seem to be wholly lost; but a man can never be sure that the horror will not return.

The real nature of this experience is best seen when it has been occasioned by the grosser and more violent forms of crime. Men who have committed murder, for example, have been driven almost insane by the memory of their evil deed. Their agony may have had nothing in it of the nature of repentance; they were not distressed because their crime had revealed to them the malignity and the fierce strength of their passions; they had no desire to become gentle and kindly. They were filled with horror and remorse by their awful guilt. They felt that the crime was theirs, and would always continue to be theirs; that it would be theirs if it remained concealed as truly as if it were known; indeed, it seemed to be in some terrible way more

truly theirs so long as the secret was kept. It was not the fear of punishment that convulsed them; they have sometimes brought on themselves public indignation and abhorrence, and have condemned themselves to the gallows by confessing their crime in order to obtain relief from their agony.

Suppose that a man possessed by this great horror discovered that, in some wonderful way, the dark and damning stain on his conscience had disappeared; that, although he had done the deed, the iron chain which bound him to the criminality of it had been broken; that before God and man and his own conscience he was free from the *guilt* of it;—the supposition, in its completeness, is an impossible one; but if it were possible, the discovery would lift the man out of the darkness of hell into the light of heaven.

But to large numbers of Christian men a discovery which in substance is identical with this has actually come in response to their trust in Christ. Nothing is more intensely real than the sense of guilt; it is as real as the eternal distinction between right and wrong in which it is rooted. And nothing is more intensely real than the sense of release from guilt which comes from the discovery

and assurance of the remission of sins. The evil things which a man has done cannot be undone; but when they have been forgiven through Christ, the iron chain which so bound him to them as to make the guilt of them eternally his has been broken; before God and his own conscience he is no longer guilty of them. This is the Christian mystery of justification, which, according to Paul—and his words have been confirmed in the experience of millions of Christian men—is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It changes darkness into light; despair into victorious hope; prostration into buoyancy and vigour. It is one of the supreme motives to Christian living, and it makes Christian living possible. The man who has received this great deliverance is no longer a convict, painfully observing all prison rules with the hope of shortening his sentence, but a child in the home of God.

There are experiences of another kind by which the faith of a Christian man is verified. Of these one of the most decisive and most wonderful is the consciousness that through Christ he has passed into the eternal and Divine order. He belongs to two worlds. He is just as certain that he is environed by

things unseen and eternal as that he is environed by things seen and temporal. In the power of the life given to him in the new birth he has entered into the kingdom of God. He is conscious that that Diviner region is now the native land of his soul. It is there that he finds perfect rest and perfect freedom. It is a relief to escape to its eternal peace and glory from the agitations and vicissitudes, the sorrows and successes, of this transitory world. It is not always that he is vividly conscious of belonging to that eternal order; this supreme blessedness is reserved for the great hours of life; but he knows that it lies about him always, and that at any moment the great apocalypse may come. And even when it is hidden, its "powers" continue to act upon him, as the light and heat of the sun pass through the clouds by which the burning splendour is softened and concealed.

Further, "in Christ" Christian men know God; they know Him for themselves. The mere conception of God is as different from the immediate knowledge of Him as the mere conception of the Matterhorn from the actual vision of it as an external objective grandeur; and it is not the conception of God, but God

Himself, that fills them with awe and wonder, and with a blessedness which trembles into devout fear. Sometimes the "exceeding weight of glory" is too great to bear, and human infirmity is relieved when the vision passes. At other times God is more than a transcendent glory to be contemplated and adored. His infinite love, to use Paul's words, is *shed abroad in their heart*, like the sun's heat under tropical heavens; it is immediately revealed. How, they cannot tell, any more than they can tell how the material world is revealed to sense; they only know that, apart from any self-originated effort, apart from any movement of their own towards Him, the Eternal Spirit draws near to their spirit and reveals God's love to them. It is as if the warm streams of the love which have their fountains in the depths of His infinite life were flowing round them and into them. They are conscious of that love for them of which God is conscious.

And this blessedness is not the prerogative of elect saints, or of those who may be said to have a natural genius for spiritual thought. It is the common inheritance of all that are "in Christ," although there is reason to fear that many Christian people rarely reach the

height of its joy. But among those who reach it are men of every degree of intellectual rank and every variety of moral and spiritual temperament. It is reached by ignorant men, whose thoughts are narrow and whose minds are inert, as well as by men with large knowledge and great powers of speculation; by men destitute of imagination, as well as by men whose imagination kindles as soon as it is touched by the splendours of nature or by the verses of poets. Men whose whole life moves slowly and sluggishly reach it, as well as men who are impulsive, ardent, and adventurous. And where this experience is known, it becomes an effective force in the moral life. Peter, writing to slaves, says, "For this is acceptable, if *through consciousness of God* a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully." [1]

[1] In the text of the Revised Version the words stand, "If for conscience toward God"; but in the margin an alternative reading is suggested, "If for conscience of God." This was Wiclif's translation, which reads, "If for conscience of God man suffereth heaviness, and suffereth unjustly," etc. In the older English writers the word "conscience" is often used where we should use "consciousness." Hooker, for example, says, "The reason why the simpler sort are moved with authority is the *conscience* of their own ignorance." We should say

I have said that "*in Christ*" men know God—not merely *through Christ*. It is true that during His earthly ministry He revealed God; so that, in answer to the prayer of one of His disciples, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," He said, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." That revelation has eternal power and value; but there are other words spoken by Christ that same night which suggest that it is not merely by the revelation of God during His earthly ministry that Christ has made it possible for men to know the Father. He said: "I am the true vine, and ye are the branches. . . . Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in Me. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from Me ye can do nothing." It is not certain that when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Galatian Christians he had heard of these words; but what

"consciousness." The Greek word which Peter uses has sometimes the one meaning, "consciousness," sometimes the other, "conscience." In 1 Pet. ii. 19 I believe that it means "consciousness."

they meant he had learnt for himself. He said, "I live: and yet no longer I, but *Christ liveth* in me." In various measures the experience of Paul has been the experience of Christian men ever since. Their relationship to Christ—their conscious relationship to Christ—has been most mysterious, but most intimate and most certain. They have meditated on the infinite love which moved Him to descend from the heights of God and to become man, upon His graciousness and gentleness, His purity, His spontaneous goodness, His pity for suffering, His merciful words to the sinful, His patience and His long-suffering, and His fiery indignation against hypocrisy; they have meditated on His teaching, on all the words of His that have been preserved concerning the love and grace of God, concerning the remission of sins, the gift of eternal life, the judgment to come, the eternal blessedness of the righteous, and the doom of the lost; they have felt the spell and the charm of that ideal perfection to which He calls them in His precepts, and which He illustrated and transcended in His own character: but they have been conscious that it was not merely by the power of the grear and pathetic story of His earthly history, ot

by the power of His spiritual and ethical teaching, that He gives to men the life of God, and constantly renews, sustains, and augments it. They shared the very life of their Lord. He lived in them. They lived in Him. And it was in the power of this common life that they knew God.

Nor is it only the immediate knowledge of God that is rendered possible by this union with Christ. Christian men are conscious that they do not receive strength from Christ for common duty, as they might receive strength from One who, while He conferred the grace, stood apart from them, but that in some wonderful way they are strong in the strength of Christ Himself. They are too often drawn down into the region of baser forces, and then they fail; but their very failure verifies the truth of their happier experiences, for it brings home to them afresh what they are apart from Christ; and when they recover their union with Him—which indeed had not been lost, though for a time it was not realized—they recovered their power.

III

The man who has had, and who still has, such experiences as these will listen with great tranquillity to criticisms which are

intended to shake the historical credit of the Four Gospels, although the story they contain may have been the original ground of his faith in Christ. The criticism may be vigorous ; he may be wholly unable to answer it : but what then ? Is he to cease to believe in Christ ? Why should he ?

Let me answer these questions by an illustration. Towards the close of our Lord's ministry, when He was in the neighbourhood of Jericho—just leaving the city or just entering it—Bartimæus, a blind man, who was begging at the side of the road, heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, and he appealed to the great Prophet to have mercy upon him. Jesus answered his appeal, and gave him sight. Now it is possible that Bartimæus may have been told by some passing traveller, of whom he knew nothing, the story of a similar miracle which Jesus had worked a few weeks before in Jerusalem, and this may have been the ground, and the only ground, of his confidence in our Lord's supernatural power. If, after he had received his sight, some sagacious friend of his had asked him how it was that he came to believe that the Nazarene Teacher could give sight to the blind, nothing would have been easier than for his friend to show that, whether the

story of the Jerusalem miracle was true or not, Bartimæus had no trustworthy evidence of its truth. A tale told by an unknown stranger! This was no sufficient reason for believing that Jesus had given sight to a man born blind. Did the stranger who told the tale know the beggar who was said to have been cured? Was it certain that the man was blind? Had the stranger examined his eyes the very morning of the day on which he received sight? Was it certain that the vision was not gradually returning? Was the stranger present when Jesus made the clay, and put it on the blind man's eyes; close enough to see that no delicate operation was performed during the process? The sending of the blind man to wash at the Pool of Siloam was suspicious: what could that washing have to do with a miracle? Did the stranger go with the man to the pool, and keep his eye upon him while he was there? Was it quite certain that the blind beggar who was sent to Siloam was the man who came back to the city and declared that Jesus had healed him? Might not one man have been sent to the pool, and another man have come back to Jerusalem? It looked very much as if there were some previous understanding between the blind man and the

Nazarene Prophet. The Prophet had rich friends; they could have made it worth the man's while to come into the plot. Had Bartimæus considered all these difficulties? Was it not more probable that the stranger's story should be false than that the miracle should be true? Would it not be well for Bartimæus to suspend his faith in Jesus until he had made further inquiries about the miracle?

We can imagine the answer of Bartimæus. I think that he would have said: "At first I believed in the power of Jesus of Nazareth, because I was told that He had given sight to another blind man; *now* I am sure of His power, because He has given sight to me. It is possible, as you say, that the story about the blind man in Jerusalem is not true. You have asked me many questions which I cannot answer. I cannot explain why he should have been sent to the Pool of Siloam. I acknowledge that the evidence which I have for the miracle is not decisive. As Jesus has restored my sight, I think that the story is probably true; but whether the story is true or not cannot disturb my faith in Him, for if He did not heal the other man, He has healed me."

And so the faith in the Living Christ of

those who have had the great experiences of His power and grace which I have described is not shaken by any assaults on the historical trustworthiness of the story of His earthly ministry. Much less can it be shaken by discussions concerning the nature and origin of the ancient Scriptures of the Jewish people. Their confidence in the books, both of the Old Testament and the New, may perhaps have to be suspended until the controversies of scholars are closed, or until, on historical and critical grounds, they can see their own way to firm and definite conclusions about the main questions at issue; but not their confidence in Christ. They may be uncertain about the books; they are sure about Him. Both Christian scholars and the commonalty of Christian people approach the controversies on these ancient records with a settled faith in His power, His grace and His glory. Their faith in Him rests on foundations which lie far beyond the reach of scientific and historical criticism. They know for themselves that Christ is the Saviour of men: for they have received through Him the remission of their own sins; He has translated them into the Divine kingdom; He has given them strength for righteousness, and through Him they have found God.

LECTURE II

THE VALIDITY OF THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE

THE argument of the preceding Lecture may be challenged. It rests on the experiences of Christian men. But are these experiences to be trusted? Do they satisfy the critical understanding? Are they sufficient to justify faith in Christ?

I

In reply to these questions it might be sufficient, for the moment, to say that, while experiences of this kind are strong and actually present they *command* certainty. They are as decisive and as irresistible as our physical perceptions of light and darkness. They leave no room for doubt. But I suppose that there are times in the history of most Christian people when the consciousness of God and of union with Christ becomes faint, and is even wholly lost, nor are they able by

any effort to recover it; times when, if they pray, they seem to be speaking into blank space, not to a living God to whom they are akin, whose knowledge of them is deeper than their knowledge of themselves, and whose love passes the measures of their faith and hope; times when all traces of those diviner powers which were once active in them seem swept away by the insurgent forces of their baser life, which spread over every province of their nature, creating everywhere confusion and desolation. In these dark and troubled days there are some firm and resolute souls that hold fast their faith in Christ, because they are still completely assured of the reality of what they saw and felt in happier times. But there are very many who are assailed by terrible doubts. They ask whether, after all, they can be so certain of the true nature of their past experiences as to live on in the power of them. Those instantaneous moral deliverances which, at the time, seemed to be the immediate effect of a definite volition of Christ's, exerted in answer to prayer, may they not have had another cause? Those movements of a moral and spiritual force which seemed at the time to be the manifestation of the exceeding greatness of God's

power, may they not have come from unsuspected fountains of strength in their own life? That consciousness of God as Another than themselves which gave them such transcendent blessedness, that consciousness of living in Christ which made the invisible order so real, may it not have been an illusion —a glorious illusion, but still an illusion, and nothing more? Are they sure that their personal life is so perfectly healthy, and that their powers are so trustworthy, that no error was possible?

With Christian men whose temper is speculative and critical, these doubts will recur frequently; and not only in times of spiritual desertion. They will recur most frequently with persons whose religious life is predominantly subjective, and whose chief and almost exclusive concern is, not to please *God* perfectly, but to satisfy *themselves* that they are pleasing Him perfectly; who are very anxious to be sure of their own love for God, but who think very little of God's love for them; who dwell, not too much on their own duty, but too little on God's grace and on the glory of the Christian redemption. They believe and yet they doubt; and their introspective habit makes the doubt always

present; they are never so possessed and mastered by the great objects of faith as wholly to forget it. There is very much in their experience that assures them of the presence and power of Christ: they are sometimes strong in a strength which does not seem to be their own; they are sometimes thrilled by the consciousness that their higher life is touching the very life of God; they sometimes think that they are living in Christ: but they are not sure of themselves. May not all these wonderful experiences be as unreal as the delusions which are the creations of a fevered brain?

II

"The creations of a fevered brain": but why are we sure, when we are ascending the valley of Zermatt, that the majestic vision of the Matterhorn is not the creation of "a fevered brain"? or, when we are strolling through the bazaars of Cairo, that the rich colours, and the strange costumes, and the latticed windows, and the crowds of people of many races, and the water-carriers, and the lounging camels, are not projected by an imagination which has been filled with the *Arabian Nights*? Or,

when we are listening to Handel's mighty hallelujahs, why are we sure that orchestra and chorus, and the tumult and the triumph of those exulting cries, and the rush of that glorious cataract of sound are not a private fancy of our own, an illusion, a dream ?

If for a moment the doubt leaps into the mind, it vanishes quickly, when we find that other men see the majestic mountain or the delightful city, and that other men hear the victorious hallelujahs.

I sometimes wonder whether I should be sure that my own perception of the sun and the stars is trustworthy if I alone saw them. Suppose — the supposition is no doubt grotesque — that when the sun arose, though everybody saw and knew that the darkness had gone and the day come, nobody but myself ever saw the sun ; and that when the day was spent, though everybody saw and knew that the light was lessening, nobody but myself ever saw the splendours disappearing behind the hills or sinking into the sea. Suppose that, although everybody saw and knew the difference between a clear and a cloudy night, nobody but myself saw the sparkling diamonds in Ursa Major. Suppose that no trace could be found, either in ancient or modern

literature, that men had ever seen these heavenly visions; suppose that no word for sun or star existed in the languages of either the East or the West, of civilized or of barbarous races. Suppose, further, that, while I, and I alone, saw the sun and the stars, many other men had a keener and surer eye than mine for all earthly objects, whether great or small, whether remote or near. It is certain that my alleged perceptions would be regarded by other men as wholly untrustworthy, and would be discussed by philosophical persons as the result of some abnormal and morbid condition. For myself, when I actually saw the sun rising morning after morning and ascending to the meridian, and when I actually saw the constellations glittering in the heavens at night, the conviction of their reality would be irresistible; and yet, side by side with this conviction, there would be doubt—doubt mastered and suppressed, but with life in it still, and certain to grow large and strong if, for many days and weeks, brooding clouds concealed the celestial glories.

But if, here and there, another man came to see what I saw; if, gradually, groups of men, men of very different descriptions, came to see what I saw; if these groups of men began

to form in other countries, in distant latitudes and under distant skies ; and if their perceptions corresponded to my own ;—if then, by some surprising discovery of a lost literature, it became certain that the poets of a vanished people had sung of the stars and the sunrise and the sunset, and that their sailors through century after century had taken observations of the celestial bodies, in order to steer their course across the ocean : if all these corroborations of what had been my private experience came to me, I should become sure of myself, and all doubt would vanish. They would add nothing to the vividness and certainty of my consciousness that I saw the sun and stars, but they would destroy the doubt of their outward reality created by the knowledge that other men did not see them. And so the knowledge that other men, as the result of their appeal to Christ, have passed into a diviner world, have found God, have received accessions of strength which they could not attribute to any sudden liberation of latent energy in their own life, have broken the chains of evil habits, have seen evil passions wither suddenly, as at the touch of an unseen hand, while it adds nothing to the distinctness or the power of similar experiences of my own, re-

lieves me from the doubt which would worry my faith if my experiences were solitary and unique. It saves me from distrust of my own consciousness.

To large numbers of men this distrust is unknown. Their life is wholesome, healthy, natural, undisturbed by the nervous solicitudes of the introspective habit. What they see they see, and they are sure that the thing they see is *there*; they would be sure of it against the world. What they hear they hear; that other men have not heard it suggests no uneasy suspicion; that other men have heard it adds nothing to their confidence. But there are many—and perhaps in these days they are exceptionally numerous—who welcome every confirmation of the trustworthiness of their own consciousness. As an English chemist might be grateful that some unexpected results which he had reached in his own laboratory had been reached by chemists in Paris or Vienna, who had made their experiments under different conditions and subjected their results to different tests, so there are many men who, however sure they may be that their own consciousness bears unambiguous testimony to the nearness and free personal activity of the Lord Jesus Christ, value the

support which their own experience receives from the experience of other Christian men.

This is probably a large part of the explanation of the additional strength and firmness which faith derives from the biographies of saints and from books of devotion. There is something more than the kindling of the religious affections through contact with devout souls in their most ardent moods; and there is something more than the access of power which results from receiving into the mind their finer conceptions of the majesty, the righteousness, and the infinite grace of God. Unconsciously to ourselves perhaps, there is a corroboration and verifying of the reality of our own experiences. What these elect saints saw we have seen, though less clearly. What they heard we have heard. We have passed into the same world as that in which they lived; we recognise the mountain ranges and the stars that shine in those fairer heavens: to them the glories of that diviner order were transcendently glorious; to us they are often partially concealed by cloud, and when the cloud breaks, our vision cannot bear the splendours for long, but the glories are the same. All that they report concerning what the grace and power of Christ achieved for

them, concerning their ascents to new heights of life, and their access to God through Him, reminds us of passage after passage in our own personal history. What they found, not in the mere tradition of His earthly life and teaching, much less in the theology of the Church, but in Himself, we too have found. The more remote they were from ourselves in their ecclesiastical associations, in their speculative conceptions of Christian truth, in all the conditions and influences which determined their religious development, the more impressive is the identity between their experience and our own.

A similar corroboration of the trustworthiness of our religious consciousness is sometimes given to us by living men. I suppose that not unfrequently a Christian scholar, whose intellectual certainties concerning the Christian revelation have been violently shaken during a morning spent over his books, has had his personal faith in Christ immeasurably strengthened, within a very few hours, while visiting the sick, the aged, and the poor. He had begun to wonder whether, after all, the great historic conception of Christ in the Four Gospels, and the New Testament story of the rise and the triumphs of the Christian Church,

might not be accounted for without assuming that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of the Eternal, the eternal Word who became flesh for us sinners and for our salvation. He was asking himself whether what he had believed were his own most definite experiences of the present power of Christ might not have been the product of subtle and mysterious forces in his own life—forces which, as they were unknown, and not under the direct control of his own will, he had perhaps too inconsiderately attributed to an external source. This in the morning. In the afternoon he sat by the side of some poor, aged, and illiterate man, whose strength was slowly wasting and the conditions of whose life were very cheerless ; but the old man had travelled by the same path that all the saints have travelled. His words, simple and rude, about what Christ had been to him, and done for him, had the accent of reality. And as the scholar listened he could recall, at point after point, identical experiences of his own. It was as if the man were telling the story of years which he had spent in some foreign country, which the scholar also had visited. They had seen the same cities and harbours and churches and palaces, the same ruins, the same mountains

and rivers, the same crops, the same trees and flowers. The old man's account of them was very different from what his own account would have been; the old man's theories and explanations of them and his own were still more different: but it was certain that what he had seen the old man had seen.

As he walked home he remembered corresponding experiences which had been told him by other men, and of which he had read in the lives of saints of other Churches, other countries, other times. He felt sure that different men—men belonging to different races and different generations—could not dream the same dreams. A man's private illusions are his own. If other men see what he sees, hear what he hears, feel what he feels, taste what he tastes, he may dismiss the fear that his organs are unsound. And so before the scholar sat down to his desk again at night he had recovered confidence in the trustworthiness of his own experiences. He had still to learn whether the Four Gospels contain an authentic account of the words and deeds of Christ in Jerusalem and Galilee more than eighteen hundred years ago; but he was sure that in our own time, and here in England, the Living Christ is the Lord and Saviour of men.

III

The question may still be asked whether, while the controversy concerning the dates and the authorship of the Four Gospels is undetermined, these experiences can be a valid ground for believing in Christ.

The terms of the question need explanation. What is meant by believing in Christ? Believing in the traditional opinion concerning the dates and authorship of the Four Gospels? Believing in their historical trustworthiness? Believing in Luke's account of the birth of John the Baptist, and of the appearance to Mary of the angel who announced the birth of our Lord? Believing in the story, told by all the evangelists, of our Lord's feeding five thousand men with five barley loaves and two small fishes on the north-eastern shore of the Lake of Galilee? Believing in the story told by John of the raising of Lazarus from the dead? If this is what is meant by believing in Christ, then clearly no valid ground for believing in Him can be found in such experiences as those which I have described in this and in the preceding Lecture.

But to believe in Christ it is not necessary that men should believe that Matthew wrote

the first Gospel, and Mark the second, and Luke the third, and John the fourth; men believed in Christ and found God in Him before any one of the Gospels was written. Nor is it necessary to believe in the historical trustworthiness of any one of the four. From Paul's account of his own preaching, it appears that he told the Corinthians "first of all . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures; and that He appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once; . . . then He appeared to James; then to all the Apostles"; and last of all to himself. A Corinthian who had heard this wonderful story, had believed it, and had trusted in Christ for the remission of sins and for eternal glory, might have been a loyal and zealous Christian for many years before he met with any of our present Gospels. If the first that came into his hands happened to be the Gospel of Matthew, I can imagine that, without any faltering of his faith in Christ, he might, for a time, have been very doubtful whether it had really been written by an apostle, and whether it was trustworthy. There is nothing in it about our Lord's appearing to "Cephas"

alone, or to "James" alone; or about His second appearance to "all the apostles"; or about His appearing to "five hundred brethren at once." He would find in the story many sayings of Christ of which probably he had never heard before, but which he would feel no other teacher could have spoken; but there were other sayings about which for a time he might be doubtful. None of the miracles would appear to him too great for the power of One whom he worshipped as Son of God and Saviour of men; about some of them he might have heard in meetings of the Church from men who had "known Christ after the flesh," and who were disposed on account of this knowledge to think they were better Christians than their brethren, who, though they had not seen, had believed; as to the rest, he might hesitate until he was fully assured about the authorship of the narrative. In the power of his faith in Christ he might be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"; and yet he might be uncertain whether the new story of Christ's life which had charmed him was really written by an apostle. To have faith in Christ is one thing; to have a sound opinion about the authorship of a book is another thing altogether. This was true in

Corinth in the first century; it is just as true in England in the nineteenth. It is by faith in Christ that men are saved, not by a belief that Matthew wrote the first Gospel.

As faith in Christ is something wholly different from the belief that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the four narratives of our Lord's earthly life contained in the New Testament, so it is wholly different from a belief in the authenticity of these narratives. If, when my heart is dark with the sense of guilt, and all my strength is broken through despair of the Divine mercy, I trust in Christ for forgiveness, and the awful weight which crushed me is removed, and the light breaks, and I am conscious that in the mystery of my personal relations to the Eternal a great change has come, and that God has absolved me; if, having known in past days the blessedness of living in the presence of God, I am lonely and desolate because no sign or intimation of the presence of God is given me, and I trust in Christ to restore me to God, and the vision and the power and the glory return; if when the springs of life seem to have dried up, and there is apathetic indifference to all those invisible and eternal things which once filled me with awe, kindled fires of love for God and for man, created an

exulting hope, transfigured the world, exalted the ideal of conduct, and inspired strength and resolution to attempt to achieve it—if then I trust in Christ to have pity on me, and the "river of water of life bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God," returns to its deserted channels, and rises and overflows its banks: if, I say, Christ in answer to my faith does these great things for me what more direct, appropriate, decisive evidence can I have that He is the Redeemer and Lord of men? It is the precise kind of evidence that I need to authenticate and confirm my faith in Him.

Suppose that we had an absolute certainty that Christ wrought every miracle attributed to Him by the four Evangelists, and that He delivered, not merely the substance of the discourses which they have recorded, but delivered them in the very words which have reached us: suppose that it had been possible to anticipate and to satisfy the conditions which alone, according to M. Renan, could make a miracle credible; suppose that, before our Lord raised the son of the widow of Nain, a commission had been constituted, composed of physiologists, chemists, great physicians, men distinguished for the accuracy of their observation and their mastery of the laws of evidence; suppose that

the commissioners had fully assured themselves that the young man was really dead ; suppose that they had designated the chamber in which the miracle was to be wrought, and had taken all possible precautions to prevent deception ; and suppose that they had certified that, at the word of our Lord, the young man had risen from the dead and walked home with his mother : and as this single wonder, so certified, would not, in M. Renan's judgment, have been a decisive proof of the miraculous power of our Lord, but would only have created " a probability almost equal to certainty," suppose that, when Lazarus died, another commission similarly constituted had sat, and with the same result : suppose—for this is necessary to the hypothesis—that the members of these commissions were men who had as large and exact and varied a knowledge of the physical sciences as could be found in Paris, Vienna, or London to-day, as keen a penetration, and an intellectual habit as cautious and as watchful : suppose that the conclusive evidence of their knowledge and of their skill was in our hands, that their integrity was beyond all doubt, that the genuineness of the separate reports in which they recorded what they had seen could not be contested ; suppose that proofs different

in kind, but equally demonstrative, assured us that Christ wrought the other miracles preserved in the story of the evangelists—walked on the sea, fed thousands of men with a few loaves and fishes, gave health to the sick, sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf : suppose, in brief, that the evidence of the historical truth of the Four Gospels were of a kind, not to invite, but to compel, unreserved and unqualified belief in every fact that they contain : would this—this alone—be sufficient to command faith in Christ ?

Not without that continued experience of His great power and infinite grace to which every generation of His disciples since the Ascension has borne testimony. For what would be our condition, even though we were absolutely certain of the historic truth of the story of His earthly life, if, after He had risen from the dead and returned to the Father, He had given no sign of His presence and activity in the spiritual order ; if through these eighteen hundred years He had delivered no penitent from the consciousness of guilt ; if no despairing man, weary of his evil ways, but unable to forsake them, had ever received from Him strength to throw off evil habits, and to suppress sensual and malignant passions ; if He had never raised

those who trusted in Him from sin to saintliness; if none of God's lost children had been found by Him, and brought home to their Father? Would faith in Him have been possible?

Or, if the wonderful and gracious story of His earthly ministry created an invincible conviction that He was one over whom death could have no power; and if we made a great venture, and appealed to Him to forgive and pity and save *us*, as He forgave and pitied and saved men during His earthly life: how long would our faith in Him last, if there came no answer —no breath of heavenly air, no touch of Divine power, no light of comfort or of hope? The historic certainty could not sustain, even if for a moment it created, faith in the Living Christ.

And now let me make another supposition. Imagine that, by some inexplicable fatality, the last three years of our Lord's earthly life had sunk into abysses of silence and oblivion as deep as those in which nearly the whole of His years from childhood till He was thirty years old have been lost; that the story of no miraculous work of mercy, the record of no word of power and comfort and grace, remained; that we knew nothing of His temptation, His tears at the grave of Lazarus, His agony in

Gethsemane ; that neither document nor tradition preserved the sermon on the mount, or His conversation with Nicodemus, or the parable of the sower, or the parable of the prodigal son, or the discourse which He delivered to His elect friends during the night in which He was betrayed ; imagine that we knew nothing more than this—that He was a great religious teacher, that He had been crucified, that those who had loved Him believed that He had risen from the dead. If this were all we knew of His earthly history, the loss to the thought and life, the strength and the joy of the Church would, no doubt, be immeasurable. But it would still be possible to believe in Him as the Lord and Saviour of the world, and to find in Him eternal life and blessedness. For *the experience of the Church through century after century would remain to bear witness to His power to redeem men of every country and every race and every age who trust in Him for redemption.* It would still be certain that, from the time His earthly friends had their last vision of Him to our own days, men of every description have discovered that when they speak to Christ, they do not speak into the air, but that He answers them, gives them peace of conscience, strength for suffering and for righteousness, and

the immediate knowledge of God. Those who knew Him "after the flesh" bore witness to His resurrection from the dead, and declared that through Him men were to receive the remission of sins and the gift of eternal life. When that generation passed away the Christian Gospel did not become a mere tradition, resting on the unsustained authority of its original preachers; new preachers arose who themselves had received through Christ the remission of sins and the gift of eternal life. And the succession has been unbroken. Every new generation has learnt the Christian Gospel from living and original witnesses to the power and grace of the Living Christ, and has then transmitted the truth, confirmed and authenticated by its own experience, to the next. And so, if the books were lost which record the earthly life of Christ, my faith in Him as my Saviour from sin, the Lord of conduct, and the Giver of eternal life would still rest on strong and immovable foundations; for my personal experience of His power and love is confirmed by the experience of sixty generations of Christian men. I find that Christian faith often fails in those who live a solitary religious life; but I find that it is strong and vigorous in those who know the blessedness and power of the communion of saints.

LECTURE III

THE DIRECT APPEAL OF CHRIST TO THE SPIRIT OF MAN

I

SIX or seven years ago, I had the honour of receiving as my guest a Japanese gentleman who had become a Christian. He spent only a few hours under my roof—he came in the afternoon, and left the next morning; but, brief as the time was, I was impressed by his moral dignity, his nobleness, devoutness, veracity, and force. Those who knew him best had a deep admiration for him; and he had shown the energy of his loyalty to Christ by making a great personal sacrifice in the service of the Church of which he was a member. He seemed to me to be one of those men who, without effort, and by the mere massiveness of their nature, assert ascendency and authority over other men. He had considerable intellectual culture, and great intellectual activity and vigour.

At night, when the house was still, I asked

him how it was that he became a Christian. I reminded him that he and his countrymen were wholly separated from the traditions of Christendom, and from that unbroken line of historic continuity by which we ourselves are united to those who first received the Christian Gospel. As we Europeans look back over the Christian centuries, we can see a succession of scholars, theologians, and saints, extending from our own times to the very beginnings of the Christian Faith. We can ascend from age to age, listening in turn to the testimony of every generation to the power and grace of the Living Christ, until at last we listen to the words of those who saw and heard the original apostles. But to the Japanese this great Christian tradition is non-existent ; to them no fires light up the vast blackness of the eighteen hundred years which separate the present generation from the first generation of Christians. I also reminded him that, although the thought and civilization of Western Christendom had recently been exerting an immense and revolutionary power in Japan, the Christian Faith had not come to his countrymen with its authority unchallenged ; that in the foremost nations of Europe the historical trustworthiness of the story of Christ had been assailed by men

of great eminence ; and that, side by side with Christianity, there had come to the Japanese a varied and powerful literature, which impeaches its claims, and calls upon Christian nations to surrender their Christian faith as an illusion. This, I believe, in substance, though not in form, is what I said to him in illustration of my question ; and I then asked him again by what path he had reached his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Son of God and Saviour of men.

His answer I can recall more closely and more accurately. He said : " I was a Confucian, and I studied the works of Confucius for many years. One thing at last perplexed me. Confucius often speaks of all good things as coming down from ' heaven.' Sometimes he speaks as if by ' heaven ' he meant a living and benignant Person, who consciously bestows blessings on mankind. In other parts of his writings it seems plain that this cannot be his meaning. But the thought came to me that, perhaps, there is a great and mighty and kindly Person above us, and this excited me. I wanted to know whether it was true ; and if it was, I wanted to learn all that could be learnt about Him. With this anxiety in my mind, I listened to the lectures of many learned men on the doctrine of Confucius, but did not find

what I wanted. At last I heard a famous Japanese philosopher who was hostile to Confucianism, and was delivering a course of critical lectures on it. His lectures made me more dissatisfied with the system than ever.

" Just then a Japanese convert to Christianity gave me a Chinese Bible, and asked me to read it. He told me that the translation was a great achievement of scholarship, and that I should be charmed with its literary beauty. I found that he was right : the translation is admirable. I read page after page till I came to the thirteenth chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, beginning, ' If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.' I read the whole chapter. I was arrested, fascinated. I had never seen or heard or dreamt of a morality like *that*. I felt that it was above the reach of the human race, that it must have come from heaven, that the man who wrote that chapter must have received light from God—from God, about whose existence I had been speculating. And then I read the Gospel of John, and the words of Christ filled me with wonder. They were not to be resisted. I could not refuse Him my faith." And so he became a Christian.

The story is worth considering.

When my Japanese friend received so profound an impression from the Epistle to the Corinthians, he asked no questions about the author to whom the Epistle is attributed: whether he claimed to have had a revelation from heaven; whether he was a man of a sound, healthy, reasonable mind, or whether he was likely to be the subject of illusions; whether, if a revelation had really come to him, all his teaching was to be received as the exact expression of the mind of the Eternal; whether he wrought miracles in proof of his Divine commission to make known to men a new faith, and, if he claimed to work miracles, what evidence authenticated them; whether it was quite certain that the Epistle was written by the man whose authority was so accredited; and whether, if originally written by him, it was certain that the true, uncorrupted text had been preserved in the Christian Scriptures. None of these questions seem to have even occurred to my friend; if they occurred, they were at once dismissed as irrelevant. Had Paul received light from heaven? *The light was there:* my friend saw it—*saw it for himself.* He was sure that it could have come from no inferior source.

And when he was reading the Fourth Gospel, he did not check his wonder and awe by asking questions about the authorship of the book. He did not ask who John was, whose name stands in the title of it, or how he was to know that John wrote it. The story of the cure of the paralytic man at the Pool of Bethesda, the story of the feeding of five thousand men with five barley loaves and two fishes, the story of the gift of sight to the beggar who had been blind from his birth, the story of the resurrection of Lazarus—these were all very surprising, but my friend does not seem to have separated miracle from miracle, in order to find out whether the writer was actually present at every one of them. He did not subject each miracle to close scrutiny, in order to discover whether, after all, some natural explanation of it might not be possible. He had a masculine understanding, disciplined both by severe studies and by familiarity with affairs; it would have been natural for him to withhold his belief from such stories as these: but the vision of glory which came to him while reading John's account of our Lord's life and teaching was a vision from another and diviner world; he fell at the feet of Christ, exclaiming, My Lord and my God! He did not ask whether

the transcendent perfection could have been the creation of the love and reverence of Christ's disciples: the question was impossible; it would have been as easy to ask whether the splendours of Orion could have been kindled from earthly fires. He *saw* the Divine majesty and the Divine grace of Christ—what could he do but worship Him?

If at any later time he had begun to doubt whether he had really seen God when he saw Christ, his doubt would have received its answer in his personal experience of the reality of the Christian redemption.

II

This was the case in which faith was *created* by the clear vision of the Divine glory in Christ; but there had been a long and effective preparation for faith. When the question concerning the conscious life and personality of the Supreme was raised by the ambiguities of Confucius, my friend did not regard it as being nothing greater than a subject of curious and interesting philosophical inquiry. It was a question which gave him no rest. It reached down to the foundations of the world and of human life. The depths of his heart were

moved. He was not afraid to learn that there is a Living God; if he could only be certain that the "heaven" of which Confucius had spoken was the name of an august Person—righteous, beneficent, in whom men live and move and have their being—this would be strength and blessedness. The Light which lighteth every man had pierced the clouds, and he loved the light, and longed to be more sure of it. When he read John's Gospel he found the light which he had been longing for. Men ought to know God when they see Him. My friend, when he saw God, knew Him.

In his case, as I have said, it was the vision of God in Christ which *created* faith; in the case of those who are already Christians, that vision confirms faith.

Their *Conscience* confesses that Christ is God. Apart from Christ, the authority of Conscience is supreme. She asks no inferior or co-ordinate power to support her claims; her accent is regal; from her word there is no appeal. And to Christian men Christ becomes an objective conscience. They do not argue that Christ wrought miracles; that therefore it is certain that He came from God; and that therefore He must be obeyed. His word is enough.

Conscience recognizes in Him the rightful Lord of conduct, and does Him homage. He speaks, "not as the scribes," nor even as the prophets of the older Faith, or as the apostles of the new. He stands alone and apart, the very Voice and Word of the eternal Law of righteousness.

Nor is it conscience alone that discovers His glory. *He appeals, and appeals immediately, to all those elements and powers of life that give answer to the manifestations of the presence of God.* What it is to find God or to be found of God every devout man knows, but the secret cannot be told. We feel His touch, and we know that the unseen Hand can be only His. There is a power upon us, and we need no visible sign or symbol to assure us that it is the power of the Eternal. A light shines; we know that it is Divine. In solitary places,—on the hills, by the sea, among the cornfields, in the woods,—in the crowded streets of great cities, the glory finds us. It finds us when we do not seek it; sometimes when we seek we cannot find it. And to Christian men these great hours often come when they are reading the Four Gospels. They witness a diviner transfiguration than that which Peter, James, and John saw on the sides of Hermon. They become independent of the proof-texts on which

biblical theologians have built their argument for our Lord's divinity; as they read, Christ *commands* their reverence, their love, their worship. They may know nothing of theological definitions, they may be perplexed by the terms of the creeds; but to them Christ is what God is, and apart even from the authority of His own words, it would be in their hearts to say that, having seen Him, they have seen the Father.

III

Are they deceived? May not the vision be a dream? Many of them would reply that, whether they are deceived or not, the impression produced on them by the story of Christ in the Gospels is irresistible. As they are so made that fire burns and ice chills them, they are so made that the story of Christ, in its substance, compels by a kindly compulsion—or rather, inspires by a gracious force— a complete faith in its truth; they could as easily doubt the reality of the material universe as doubt the reality of the historic Christ. They would say that, however it may be with others, however it may be even with many who share their faith, there is for them no necessity that the

historical " witnesses " should show their credentials ; they care very little about the historical " witnesses " ; for them the story itself is like one of the grander objects of nature—it could not have been man's work. It may, indeed, bear traces, easily recognizable, of the intervention of human agency, as there are easily recognizable traces of the intervention of human agency in the roads and paths on the sides of Helvellyn, and in the piers and docks on the shores of the Atlantic. But no human hands created Helvellyn or the Atlantic. The mountain was there, the ocean and its shores were there, before human hands touched them ; and what human hands have done has not effaced, has not obscured, their true origin and greatness. And no human devotion or genius created the Figure of the historic Christ. He was there, He must have been there, before His story was told by the evangelists ; and whatever signs of human limitation and infirmity may be found in the story cannot diminish the force of the impression that it is in substance a true account of a unique manifestation of the Person and Life of God under the conditions which determine the manifestation of the personality and life of man.

To those who have seen God in the historic

Christ, the trustworthiness of the story as satisfying the ordinary tests of historic credibility is no doubt an inquiry of great interest, but it is not of primary importance. The proof that the writers were honest and intelligent men, and that they were actual witnesses of Christ's wonderful works and actual hearers of His great discourses, or that they learnt what they have told us from other persons who had this original knowledge of what Christ did and taught, or that their story was received as authentic by persons who had the best means of knowing whether it was the story which had been told by apostles, is not the condition precedent of confidence in the substantial truth of their narratives. For the history is not an ordinary history ; if it were, it would stand or fall by the ordinary historical tests. It is wholly exceptional. Instead of resting upon the demonstrated credibility of the evangelists, it demonstrates their credibility.

There is nothing unreasonable in this. On the Christian hypothesis that the Lord Jesus Christ was the eternal Word who became flesh and dwelt among men " full of grace and truth," and that His disciples " beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father,"—on this hypothesis, we may expect that the true

story of His earthly life will carry with it its own authentication. Is it wonderful, is it in any sense contrary to reason, that those who know God should recognize the accent of God in the words of His eternal Son, and the power and life of God in His character and history ?

IV

But, as I have said, even those whose direct vision of the glory of God in Christ has been clearest are not undisturbed by the clamorous protests of the inferior forces of their nature against the reality of the objects of faith ; and they have to reckon with that critical faculty which is for ever questioning the trustworthiness and analyzing the contents of consciousness.

Let no one suppose that Christian men know nothing of the philosophy of illusions, nothing of the mysteries and enchantments which are worked by invisible powers in the secret laboratories of life ; that they have not discovered how easy it is for the mind to impress its own forms on the objects of perception, and to give them its own colour ; how easy for the imagination and for strong emotion—apart from volition and against the strenuous effort of

volition—to give such a body to subjective experiences that for the time they have all the solidity of objective realities. They too have had their dreams; and the dreams were so vivid that, when they woke, the world of dreams seemed the real world, and the real world a world of dreams. They have seen ghosts—ghosts projected into the common air by some morbid and abnormal action of interior powers which have no name; ghosts gracious and kindly, ghosts cruel and terrible. They have learnt to scrutinize and to test with the coolest and most judicial impartiality the higher experiences of the soul. And their perception of the Divine glory in the historic Christ stands the closest scrutiny and the severest tests.

They know that in the hours in which they are surest that they are living in the Divine order, the glory of Christ is clearest and most unclouded, and that when they have the calmest and yet the strongest consciousness of the nearness of the Eternal the glory of Christ is most Divine. They know that in some wonderful way the historic Christ clears and strengthens that great faculty—whatever it may be named—by which they are immediately conscious of God. They know that, instead of their conception of God being contracted, dimmed,

impoverished by finding God in Him, it is indefinitely expanded and ennobled and filled with a purer and intenser light. The incarnation of Christ, His miracles, His goodness, His sanctity, His gentleness, and His strength, His common human experiences, His blessed life in the Father, His promises, His menaces, the shedding of His blood for "the remission of sins," His resurrection, His ascension—these create a conception of the Eternal far transcending, not merely in tenderness, but in grandeur and in majesty, and in all those elements of power which command reverence and awe, any conception of Him created by the immensities of space filled with the splendours of His countless worlds, or by the immensities of time through which, unfainting and unwearied, He in His solitary strength, has sustained the burden of all created things.

V

That the vision of God in the historic Christ is no illusion is verified by its correspondence with that knowledge of the *Living* Christ which is given in the personal experience of Christian men. For the Living Christ, who is the object of Christian faith, and whose presence in the Chris-

tian consciousness is the most potent force in the Christian life, is God, and yet Another than God; He is man, and yet infinitely more than man. If His humanity is now transfigured by His Divine glory, there was a time when His Divine glory was manifested under the common conditions of humanity. The Christ who is on the throne of the Eternal once lived here. And Christian men are certain that, whatever imperfections may be detected in the story, they recognize in the Christ of the Four Gospels the same august Person of whom they have an immediate knowledge, and in whom they have found eternal life and eternal redemption. The conception of the Historic Christ given in the Gospels is, in its substance, identical with the conception of the Living Christ given in their own consciousness. They interlock. They blend into one.

It is conceivable that we might have known nothing, either from authentic documents or from tradition, of our Lord's earthly history. Our historic knowledge of Him might have been no ampler than that brief Gospel which Paul says that he preached to the Corinthians, and which I quoted in the last Lecture: "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins

according to the Scriptures ; and that He was buried ; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ; and that he appeared to Cephas ; then to the twelve ; then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once ; . . . then He appeared to James ; then to all the apostles ; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, He appeared to me also." Whatever Paul may have told the Corinthians afterwards, his Gospel appears to have begun with Christ's death, burial and resurrection ; and he then went on to recite our Lord's appearances to His apostles and disciples during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension, and last of all to himself. It is conceivable, I say, that we might have known nothing of that pathetic and glorious history which preceded the crucifixion ; for us, the Gospel might have begun with the death of Christ " for our sins." Or, if we had known more, our additional knowledge might have been limited to the brief summary of our Lord's ministry contained in Peter's discourse on the day of Pentecost : " Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know ; Him, being delivered up

by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay." Of Christ "after the flesh"—Christ in His place and work and sufferings in the natural and visible order of the world—we might have known nothing more than this.

Now, if all tradition of the earthly Christ had been lost to us, how impossible it would have been to construct an imaginary history of the years of His humiliation which would not have been incongruous with what we know of Him in His eternal glory—a history which would have given us the impression that He was really man, and yet the Son of the Eternal. But there is unbroken continuity between the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ as given in the Gospels and His present relations both to the Father and the human race. He is "the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and for ever." The earthly Christ and the heavenly Christ are one.

He was truly man: was born, grew up from infancy to childhood, and from childhood to youth and manhood. He hungered and thirsted; when He was weary He slept; the sweat fell off from Him in His agony; He was crucified as a criminal; He died. He grew in

knowledge, and even in His maturity His knowledge, like ours, had its limits. He had the common affections as well as the common relationships of the race ; some of His friends were dearer to Him than the rest. He was dependent on the Father as we are dependent ; He was filled with the Holy Spirit ; He was tempted ; He prayed. When He was " made flesh," He accepted all the conditions of human life, and He never violated them. And yet from the very first there were premonitions and manifestations of His unique greatness. He was born—but not as other children are born. An angel came to the Jewish maiden who was destined to be His mother, and brought her this surprising message : " The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee : wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God." Before His birth the power of prophecy came on her. Soon after He was born an angel appeared to shepherds who were watching their sheep, and told them that the Christ, for whose coming the elect nation had been waiting for centuries, had come at last ; and then they heard " a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace

among men, in whom He is well pleased." While He was still at Bethlehem, wise men from the East, who had seen a wonderful appearance in the heavens, which for them was the sign of the birth of that great Jewish Prince of whose approaching advent there were vague anticipations in many lands, came to worship Him. Of His childhood we have only a passing glimpse. At twelve years of age He is in Jerusalem at a great feast; and for Him the temple is His "Father's house," in which Mary and Joseph might have been certain that they would find Him; and He is "sitting in the midst of the doctors," with open mind, eager to learn all that they can tell Him, but asking such questions and giving such answers, that "all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding."

When His public ministry began there was something new and strange about His teaching. It had a singular attractiveness and charm; men "wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth." He spoke—men felt it—on the strength of an original and direct knowledge of God and the will of God; He quoted the Scriptures, and they had their use for Him, else how could He have been man? but through Him a fresh word of God

was heard : " He taught as one having authority, and not as their scribes."

His miracles fill the people with wonder. They are gracious, kindly miracles. He does not seek occasions for displaying His power ; He exerts it as men need it. Some of these " signs " have a curiously felicitous, but most natural, connexion with events and circumstances which illustrate most vividly the reality of His human nature. He has had an exhausting day, and is sleeping in the boat in which He and His disciples were accustomed to pass from one point of the shore of the Lake of Galilee to another—sleeping so soundly because of His exhaustion that the storm does not wake Him. How truly human He is ! But He is roused by His friends, who are in great terror ; and as soon as He is awake, He stands up in the boat, and rebukes the winds and the sea, and there is a great calm. He is much more than man.—At the grave of Lazarus, for whom He had a strong affection, He is troubled ; the tears of Mary and of the Jews who are wailing for the dead move Him profoundly ; He struggles with the violence of His emotion ; He weeps. There is all the anguish of human sympathy and human bereavement. But presently He cries with a loud voice, " Lazarus,

come forth ! " And His dead friend appears at His call, and returns home with Martha and Mary. He speaks in the power of God.

The impression of " authority," and of an authority of an altogether unique kind, produced by His earlier ministry is deepened as His teaching becomes fuller and more explicit. There is a new accent in all His words, even in the simplest of them ; and there are passages in His discourses in which He assumes prerogatives and powers such as no prophet had ever claimed before. He forgives the sins of men. He calls to Himself all that labour and are heavy-laden, and promises that HE will give them rest. He declares that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is in the midst of them ; reminding us of the great Jewish saying, which was perhaps already current in our Lord's time, that where two of the devout sons of Abraham are studying the Divine law together, *there* is the Shechinah, the glory which is an assurance of the presence of the God of Israel. He is the Shepherd of the flock of God, whether they are in the Jewish fold, or scattered over the great waste and wilderness of heathenism ; He has come to lay down His life for the sheep, and they are to become one flock under one Shepherd. To all

that listen to His voice and follow Him He gives eternal life ; and He says that they shall " never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hands." The life which He gives is not given once for all ; those who receive it are continuously dependent upon Him ; " apart " from Him they wither and die, like the branches apart from the vine. He Himself is " the Way, the Truth, and the Life " ; " no one cometh to the Father " but by Him. He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him. To have seen Him is to have seen the Father. He will pray the Father, and the Father will send His disciples another Comforter—a Divine Person—to teach, strengthen, and defend them. He Himself will send the Comforter, and the Comforter will glorify Him. He associates Himself with the Eternal : " He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father ; and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him. . . . My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him." He is to die, but His blood is to be " shed for many unto remission of sins." As for Himself, He has no sins that need remission.

He is man—really man ; but He is not as other men. He is tempted ; but the temptations which assail Him are such as might well

assail the Son of the Eternal who had been "made flesh"; their appeal is to One whose personality is unique, and who is destined to unique sorrows and to unique greatness. He prays; but He does not pray with His friends, though sometimes He prays in their presence, and they hear the great words which He addresses to His Father. They are words which, while they imply the humblest submission and the completest dependence, imply also a freedom of access to God, resting on community of life and community of dignity, such as can belong to none but Himself. They express at once the reality of His eternal union with the Father, and the reality of His acceptance of all the conditions of humanity.[1]

The story transcends invention; it must be true. And this is the very Christ whom we know for ourselves, the Christ who has been known to Christian men for sixty generations.

[1] The argument in the preceding paragraphs is admirably stated and illustrated in the Hulsean Lectures for 1856 by Dr. Harvey Goodwin: *The Glory of the Only Begotten of the Father seen in the Manhood of Christ.*

LECTURE IV

REPLY TO CRITICISMS ON THE PRECEDING LECTURES

THIS morning I propose to discuss some considerations which may appear to invalidate certain positions maintained in the preceding Lectures, and then to inquire to what extent the conclusions which we have reached support the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels.

You will remember that the substance of the first answer which I have given to the question, Why is it that those of us who believe in Christ have continued to believe in Him, in the presence of the strong and persistent assaults which have been made from many quarters on the authority of the Christian Scriptures? is this: Whatever may have been the original grounds of our faith in Christ, our faith has been verified, and verified in many ways, in our own personal experience. Our case is the case

of Bartimæus, the blind beggar of Jericho. His original reasons for believing in the miraculous power of the Prophet of Nazareth may have been inadequate; he may have had nothing more to go upon than the story of a passing stranger about a blind man in Jerusalem, whose eyes Jesus had anointed with clay, and who, after he had been sent to wash in the Pool of Siloam, came back to the city seeing; the stranger himself might not have seen the miracle; he might only have heard the report of it; or, if he professed to have seen it, Bartimæus may have had no proof that he was an honest man, and that his word was to be trusted: but as soon as Bartimæus himself had received sight, no doubts, however grave, about the truth of the stranger's story would disturb his certainty that our Lord could work miracles. His original faith may have rested on evidence which subsequent reflection and inquiry showed to be unsatisfactory; but as soon as he himself saw the faces of his friends, and the streets and houses in the city of Jericho, and the waters of the Dead Sea, and the mountains of Moab standing like a great wall against the splendour of the clear, blue sky, his faith rested on immovable foundations of personal experience. And so the original faith of Christian people

may have rested or may have seemed to rest, on tradition, on the testimony of friends to the grace of Christ and the glory of the Christian redemption, on a belief in the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures. They may discover that to build their faith on tradition is to build on the sand; after the lapse of years, the testimony of friends which at first so strongly impressed them may no longer retain its freshness and power, and they may wonder that it should ever have had such decisive force; they may become familiar with the controversies concerning the authenticity and genuineness of the Four Gospels, and concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures generally, and they may be unable to see their way to any firm conclusions on some of the principal questions at issue. The original grounds of their faith—or what they supposed to be the original grounds of their faith—have vanished. But their faith in Christ is firmer than ever; for they know from their own personal experience that the living Christ is the way to the Father, the Lord and the Saviour of men.

I

It may be objected that the adherents of

false religions can make the same appeal to experience in verification of their faith, and that therefore the argument from experience cannot be valid. It has been suggested to me that a devout Mahometan, for example, may be certain that his experience confirms the Divine mission of Mahomet, just as a devout Christian is certain that his experience confirms the Divine mission of Christ.

It might not, perhaps, be wholly unreasonable to reply that very few of us know anything about the religious experience of devout Mahometans; that the objection rests on what we *imagine* to be the experience of men of other races living in distant lands, and that it is alleged against what we *know* to be the actual experience of our own countrymen. But I am anxious to attribute the largest conceivable weight to the objection; the consideration of it will give additional clearness to the real nature of the Christian argument.

What is it then that the experience of a devout Mahometan verifies? Does it verify anything more than the truth explicitly or implicitly contained in Mahomet's great message: that there is one God, awful in His greatness, whose will is supreme, whose power is too mighty for heaven or earth to resist, who is the

strong Defender and eternal Friend of the faithful, and in whom men may find strength and courage and peace? This conception of God, though inadequate, is true as far as it goes. The devout Mahometan would be wholly in the right in maintaining that his experience confirmed his faith in the unity and awful greatness of God, and was an adequate reason for holding fast to it in the presence of the idolatries of heathen races, and of the degeneracy and superstitions of those Christian nations in which he could find no real and living sense of the august supremacy and the power and glory of the Eternal.

But from *experience* he can learn nothing about Mahomet. All that his experience verifies is the truth of a part of Mahomet's message. He may *infer* that the man who delivered so great a message, with such power and effect, must have been sent of God to deliver it; and I should not care to dispute the inference. If he went on to infer, and to require me to admit, that everything that Mahomet taught—what he taught, for example, about the sensuous joys to which the faithful are destined in paradise—is also true, and is to be received as part of a message from heaven, I should raise an objection. I should say: "What you have

verified in your own experience you are bound to hold as true; but that Mahomet taught some great truths is no proof that he did not teach some serious errors. The truth of those parts of his teaching which you have verified does not compel you to regard as true those parts of his teaching which, from their very nature, are as yet incapable of verification. This unverified teaching rests on Mahomet's authority; and there is nothing in your personal experience which can assure you of either the nature or the limits of that authority."

So much for what I might say to a devout Mahometan; I prefer to finish the discussion by addressing, not an imaginary Mahometan in Cairo, Constantinople, or Damascus, but yourselves.

The objection rests upon a false assumption. It assumes that what may be verified in the experience of a devout Mahometan corresponds to what may be verified in the experience of a devout Christian. But, as I have said, what the Mahometan can verify is simply the truth of a part of Mahomet's message, which was delivered twelve centuries and a half ago. What the Christian verifies is the present power and grace of Jesus Christ Himself. The truth

verified by the Mahometan has only an extrinsic and accidental relation to Mahomet. It would be an august truth, whoever had first proclaimed it to the people of Arabia; it is an august truth, whatever errors may have been associated with it in the teaching of the great man who actually proclaimed it. But the Christian Gospel, verified by the Christian, is not merely a truth or a body of truths first *taught* by Christ: it is a truth, a body of truths, concerning Christ *Himself*; in its very essence and substance it is related to Christ. Mahomet delivered his message; men received it; and from that time the truth which it contained was a great, living force in the world; and it is this truth which is verified in the experience of devout Mahometans: of Mahomet himself they have no experience. But Christ—not the truth which He taught, apart from Himself—Christ Himself is the effective Saviour of men in every country and in every age; and what is verified in Christian experience is that Christ Himself gives eternal life, quenches or subdues evil passions, and is the strength of all Christian righteousness; Christian men are conscious that, in the power, not of the truth which He taught, but of personal union with Himself, they have their place in the eternal order and

know the blessedness of fellowship with God. The devout Mahometan may *infer*, from his experience of the truth of Mahomet's message concerning the unity and awful greatness of the Eternal, that Mahomet, who has been dead for twelve hundred years, was a prophet sent from God; within what limits, and with what qualifications, the inference is valid, is a question for discussion. The devout Christian has an immediate knowledge of the Living Christ as the Saviour of men. This is not an inference from experience; it is *given* in experience.

It has also been objected, that the adherents of corrupt forms of Christianity may appeal to experience as verifying, not only the general substance of the Christian Gospel, but specific corruptions of it; and that therefore the appeal to experience is not decisive. For example, it is alleged that a superstitious Catholic who has committed murder, and who is tortured with a sense of guilt, may confess his crime to a priest, and leave the confessional with a light heart; to him, therefore, it is certain that the priest has authority to absolve him from his crime. But this, again, is an imaginary experience brought forward to invalidate the force of an experience that is real. We Protestants

know very little about Catholic criminals, or about the peace of heart which is given them by absolution.

But let us construct our case. We are to suppose that the criminal is oppressed with a horror of his guilt; that he is not merely dreading the flames of hell. His conscience is inflicting on him intolerable torture; it is the past crime which is the haunting, agonizing terror, not the future penalty which may come upon him for having committed it. And we are to suppose that, after receiving absolution from the priest, he is liberated from the sense of guilt, and liberated completely; his freedom is as buoyant as that which, according to our experience, comes in answer to our trust in the redemption and the infinite grace of Christ. This is the imaginary case.

But could this be a real case? Could it be a complete account of a real case? An imaginary criminal who has received from an imaginary absolution an imaginary release from the sense of guilt cannot be examined; his experience cannot be tested. But if I met a murderer coming out of a Catholic church with a face in which I could see peace and hope and thankfulness, I should like to ask him a few questions. When he confessed his sin, did the priest remind him

that Christ had died for the sins of men? Did he himself recall that gracious, that awful form, extended on the cross, before which he had been accustomed, from his childhood, to bow with penitence and worship? Did he pass in thought from the crucifix to Christ—Son of God, Son of man, sacrifice for the sin of the world? Did the priest pronounce the words of absolution in his own name or in Christ's name? Was it in the authority and grace of the priest that he found rest of heart, or in the authority and grace of Christ, for whom, as he believed, the priest spoke? If the priest was but the channel of the mercy and power of Christ, then the man's experience does not contradict, but confirm mine; it was from Christ that he received release, and to Christ, not to the priest, he would say with a grateful heart, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hast Thou removed my transgressions from me." If, on the other hand, it is supposed that the criminal did not pass beyond the priest to Christ, I should deny that the imaginary case could ever be a real one.

II

An objection of another kind may be taken to the line of argument in the preceding Lec-

tures. It may be said that, if Christian men were asked why they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they would not give either of the answers which I have given for them. Nine out of ten would reply that they believe in Christ because they believe that the whole Bible, from the first chapter in the book of Genesis to the last chapter in the book of the Revelation, was inspired by God, and that every sentence is covered by His authority. Or they would say that they believe that the four Gospels were written by men whose word can be trusted; that the miracles attributed to Christ were really wrought by Him; that the miracles establish His claim to be the Son of God and Saviour of the world; and that therefore they trust in Him for salvation. They would acknowledge with gratitude that they have the kind of experience which I have described, and that they see for themselves the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord; but would say—some of them—that their faith would perish if they began to doubt the Divine authority of any book, or any part of any book, in the Old Testament or the New; others, that their faith would perish if they began to doubt whether the Four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

I think it very probable that a large majority of Christian men in this country would give one or other of these answers, and would commit themselves to one or other of these contentions. But it is very certain that very many of those who have the firmest belief in the inspiration and authority of all the books contained in that wonderful library of Jewish and early Christian writings which we call the Bible have never seriously examined the grounds of their belief. They are sure that the books are inspired, but, apart from their own experience of the spiritual force of the books, they can produce no reasons for believing in their inspiration; their belief, as far as it is anything more than an inheritance from the traditions of the Christian Church, is an *inference* from experience.

And it is equally certain that very many of those who have the strongest confidence in the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels have never investigated the grounds on which they believe that "there is satisfactory evidence," to use the convenient words of Paley, "that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of

their belief in those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct." Nor have they ever passed on to inquire "whether the account which our Scriptures contain be that story, that which these men delivered, and for which they acted and suffered as they did." They would vehemently deny that their faith in Christ rested either on the authority of scholars or on tradition. They would insist that they have a personal certainty, which no assaults can shake, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of mankind. But as they have never investigated for themselves the historical argument for the genuineness and authenticity of the Four Gospels, their certainty cannot really rest on the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament story.

The real grounds of a man's belief, like the real motives of a man's conduct, are not always known to himself. Let me illustrate what I mean. I know a Nonconformist chapel, in which what may be described as a shallow, semi-elliptical apse behind the platform on which the preacher stands is screened off from the rest of the building by a row of Ionic columns, supporting, or apparently supporting, a massive architrave. A few years ago it became necessary to break through the screen,

in order to place part of the organ in the apse. This innovation threatened the destruction of some of those stately columns, which were the pride and admiration of the men by whom the chapel was built; but the catastrophe was averted. All the space that was necessary for the organ was obtained by cutting away the lower half of the two central columns—they looked as if they were stone, they were really of wood—and leaving their two capitals with eight or ten feet of each of the shafts *suspended* to the architrave which they appeared to support. The columns had never supported what they seemed to support; the architrave had always been kept in its place by other means. That the lower half of the shaft of two of them has been removed is now concealed by the organ and its case. The columns are as important and stately as ever; they still seem to bear up a great weight, but two of them are hanging on to the architrave instead of supporting it. This is bad architecture; but something very like it may be seen in the architecture of human opinions and beliefs. The pillars—apparently of solid marble, really of worm-eaten wood—on which we imagine that some of our most important convictions rest, might be removed, and the convictions would remain firm and

unmoved; they really rest on quite other supports—supports which are not apparent to the eye, and which we have never had the penetration to discover. The elaborate reasons, the formal demonstrations, which the intellect regards with pride as a row of stately columns upholding its faith, are *suspended* from the faith which is supposed to rest upon them. Cut through the columns half-way between base and capital, and the faith is undisturbed; but let the strength of the faith itself be impaired, and then the reasons and demonstrations fall into ruins.

In common life it is not unusual to find men who have a sound, practical judgment, but who can give only a very poor account of the considerations which have determined their judgment. We trust them till they begin to explain. Their conclusions are sagacious; their reasons are worthless. The truth is that they reached their conclusions by a path which they cannot trace; their "reasons" are an after-thought; they are not the reasons which really guided them. Men of this kind have an understanding naturally strong and penetrating, and their fairness and self-control have prevented them from injuring an excellent instrument by rough usage. They have had

an experience of affairs which influences them without their knowledge. Their experience has trained them—not *taught* them—to be courageous at the right time and to be cautious at the right time, to be trustful and suspicious with the right men. And so their judgments are right. But the intellectual processes by which their judgments are determined are of an automatic kind, and are too swift and too subtle to be recognized at the time, or to be discovered afterwards by a mind not accustomed to introspection; the ethical factors which assisted to give form and substance to the conclusion are likely to be wholly disregarded.[1]

It need not surprise us therefore if Christian men sometimes give very inadequate reasons for believing in Christ. It does not follow that their belief has no solid foundations, or that you can destroy their belief by destroying the reasons which they allege for it. These may not be the real reasons. Indeed, as I have said, the reasons which are supposed to be the support of faith are often supported by it. Men think that they believe in Christ because they believe in the Bible; they really believe

[1] See a remarkable sermon on "Explicit and Implicit Reason," in *Sermons chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief*. By John Henry Newman (1843).

in the Bible because they believe in Christ. They think that their Christian faith rests on their belief in the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels; their belief in the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels really rests on their Christian faith. They know Christ for themselves; in the Gospels they recognize the Christ whom they know; and therefore they believe that the Gospels are trustworthy.

III

The question, Whether faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is an adequate ground for belief in the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures, opens wide discussions, into which it is no part of my intention to enter. But the question, Whether faith in Christ is an adequate ground for believing in the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels, lies immediately in our way; for the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels will be the subject of the future Lectures of this course.

You will remember that I have said that in the Christ of the Four Gospels Christian men see for themselves the very glory of God. They know Him. He is the Christ in whom their

life is rooted, the Christ who has liberated them from the sense of guilt, broken or loosened the chains of their evil habits, extinguished or subdued the fire of their evil passions, given them all the strength they have ever had for righteous living. They recognize His voice, His tone, His accent. His words in the printed book—words spoken more than eighteen hundred years ago—sometimes come to them as if they were fresh from His lips; they could not have been spoken by any one but Him. The Christ of the Gospels knows their innermost heart as the Living Christ knows it. He has the same unique tenderness and the same severity, the same majesty and the same gentleness. It is in the power of that very communion between Christ Himself and the Father which is illustrated in the Christ of the Gospels that they themselves find God.

What is the legitimate inference from these great experiences? Do they authenticate the historical trustworthiness of the four narratives of our Lord's earthly life contained in the New Testament? Do they render unnecessary all critical inquiries? Do they close all discussion concerning the dates and the authorship of the several narratives?

That these experiences authenticate the

substantial truth of the Four Gospels is obvious. To those who see the glory of God in the Christ of the Gospels, and who recognize in Him the Christ they know for themselves, and who is the Lord, the strength, the joy, the glory of their life, doubt concerning the *substantial* truth of the Gospels is impossible. But their substantial truth does not necessarily carry with it the certainty that they were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or even that they were written before the first generation of Christians had passed away. There may be—there are—very decisive proofs of another kind that the men who wrote them belonged to that generation; but the substantial truth of the narratives, as accounts of what was said and done by the Lord Jesus Christ, is not inconsistent with the theory that they were the product of a later age. For it is conceivable that a personality so powerful and so unique as that of Christ might have impressed itself with such force upon the first generation of His disciples, that they transmitted to their immediate successors a conception of Him as strong and as definite as their own, and that by these in turn it was transmitted to a third generation. In His whole character and spirit, in His relations both to

God and to man, there was something so fresh and so original, that even if His earthly friends had left no written documents preserving their exact knowledge of His earthly history, the tradition of it could hardly have been corrupted by alien elements till a long time after those who had known Him in Galilee and in Jerusalem had passed away. His teaching also was so different, both in substance and in manner, from all other teaching, that even the tradition of it would naturally and forcibly reject all foreign accretions. We know that before the third Gospel was written "many had" taken in hand to draw up accounts of the earthly life and ministry of our Lord; and as these narratives contained what had been "delivered" to the second generation of Christians by those who "from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word," there were written materials of the highest authenticity, which might have been used by writers of the third or fourth generation of Christians. Accounts drawn from such sources would have that substantial truth which Christian men recognize for themselves in the story of the Four Gospels.

We may see for ourselves the glory of God in the historic Christ of the New Testament;

we may be certain that that gracious, pathetic, Divine Personality was not created by any human imagination ; in that historic Christ we may recognize the living and glorified Christ, through whom we ourselves have received eternal redemption : and yet we may have to inquire in what age and by what persons the Four Gospels were written. Their substantial truth is not, in itself and apart from all other considerations, a final proof that they were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Uncertainty with regard to the authorship of the Four Gospels, uncertainty with regard to the dates at which they were written, is not to be regarded as the sign of faltering faith in Christ. Questions of literature should be distinguished from questions of faith. Many great scholars are sure that the Gospels were written by the men to whom they are attributed; but the acceptance of the conclusions of great scholars concerning the authorship of certain wonderful books is not one of the conditions of eternal salvation ; it is something wholly different from faith in Christ : nor is it conceivable that a confidence in the learning and judgment of the most eminent of scholars is a condition precedent of faith in Him. The tradition of the Church declares that we owe

the story of Christ to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; but faith in Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour and Lord of men, is something wholly different from a conviction that it is impossible for the tradition of the Church about the authorship of the Four Gospels to be erroneous.

Very few of us have investigated for ourselves the grounds of the prevalent and ancient belief concerning the authorship of these sacred books; we have accepted the tradition; we have been satisfied with the judgment of great orthodox scholars; but there is no want of religious faith in questioning, in doubting whether, after all, the tradition is absolutely trustworthy, or whether the judgment of scholars—even the greatest and most orthodox—is infallible.

Religious doubt is of another kind, and relates to other objects. Its roots are in the moral and spiritual life, not in the intellect. It has to do with the power and grace and glory of Christ, not with the conclusions of scholars or with the tradition of the Church. Do not be greatly troubled if, in conversation with a friend, or while reading an article in a review, you come to the conclusion that the

argument for the early date of the Four Gospels is not so decisive as you had supposed. Do not imagine that your sense of uncertainty on a question of this description is any sign that your Christian faith is giving way.

But if, when it begins to appear possible that the traditional belief of the Church concerning the authorship of the Four Gospels may, after all, be erroneous, you are conscious—however faintly—of a certain sense of relief; if, with the intellectual doubt, you are conscious of any relaxation of the claims of Christ upon your loyal devotion and your unreserved obedience; and if the relaxation is welcomed rather than dreaded: then you have reason for alarm. Or if, when the intellectual doubt begins to fasten itself upon you, you can discover that you have been gradually losing the moral and spiritual sense of your own need of the Christian redemption; or that, perhaps, as the result of causes which you can trace, and for which you are responsible, your consciousness of the reality of that redemption is less vivid than it once was; if your thirst for the Living God has been less urgent; if the satisfaction of that thirst has been less refreshing and animating; then there are grave reasons for anxiety. The intellectual doubt

which is an assailant from the outside has its confederates in the very citadel of your moral and spiritual life. When faith has been surrendered, you may imagine that you have had no choice, that your intellectual integrity forced you to abandon it; and yet the surrender might never have been made but for the treachery of internal foes.

LECTURE V

THE HISTORICAL TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STORY CONTAINED IN THE FOUR GOSPELS: HOW SHOULD THE EVIDENCE BE APPROACHED?

IN the preceding Lectures I have endeavoured to explain how it is that the faith of the majority of Christian people has not been shaken by the storm of criticism which, during the whole lifetime of the present generation, has been beating on the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I have endeavoured to show that, even while a Christian man is unable to reach any definite and secure conclusion on the controversy concerning the origin of the Four Gospels, his faith in Christ as Son of God and Saviour of men may remain firm; that he has grounds and reasons for his faith which lie beyond the reach of criticism concerning the authorship and authenticity of these wonderful narratives; that he stands on a rock, and that "the floods of great waters," when

they rise highest and rage most fiercely, cannot "come nigh unto him."

But though faith in the Lord Jesus Christ may remain firm, while the historical trustworthiness of the only story that has come down to us of His earthly ministry is regarded as uncertain, Christian life and thought suffer a loss which cannot be measured. In the remaining Lectures of this course I therefore propose to lay before you some of the evidence which sustains the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels. Can we trust the Gospels? Have we the story of Christ which was told by the apostles and personal friends of our Lord, and which was received by the first generation of their disciples? or is it the story of a later age? The primary question, the question of urgent practical importance, is not a *literary* one,—Did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John write these books? but an *historical* one,—Do these books contain that representation of our Lord, that account of His miracles and teaching, which was given by the men who knew Him, and who, after His death, preached the Christian Faith?

It is often assumed that the literary question—the question of authorship—must be settled, and settled beyond dispute and doubt,

before we can be sure that the contents of the Gospels are trustworthy. The principles of a legal trial are applied to this inquiry. It is supposed that we must know who the witnesses are before we can judge of the value of their testimony; that we must be sure of their character; that we must learn whether they had opportunities for knowing the facts; that we must discover whether they are reasonable and cautious persons, or hasty and fanatical.

But this, as I hope to show before these Lectures are finished, is to invert the true order of the inquiry. In the case of the first three Gospels our confidence in their story does not rest on a preliminary demonstration that they were written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were truthful and sagacious men, and had opportunities for knowing the real facts of our Lord's history. I think that the evidence that they wrote these Gospels is *sufficient*; but if it were insufficient, if we had reason to believe that their names were attached to these three narratives on the authority of a doubtful tradition, my confidence in their account of our Lord's life and ministry would not be disturbed. I believe that these three Gospels contain a trustworthy account of our Lord, *whoever may have*

written them. I receive their story, not on the uncorroborated testimony of the three men by whom they were written, or by whom it is commonly supposed that they were written, but on the authority of the first generation of Christians, who had learned the Christian Gospel and the earthly history of our Lord from the original apostles and other personal friends of Christ.

In the case of the Fourth Gospel the question of trustworthiness is more deeply implicated in the question of authorship. I believe that the proof—external and internal taken together—of John's authorship is not merely sufficient, but *decisive.* But even in the case of the Fourth Gospel, the primary and important question is not, Did the Apostle John write the book? but, Does the book contain in substance the account of our Lord which John was accustomed to give to his disciples? The aim therefore of the following Lectures is to show that the story of the Lord in our Four Gospels is the story which was told by the apostles themselves.

There is no dispute that at the close of the second century these Gospels were received by all Christian Churches as absolutely trustworthy, and as having the authority which

belongs to sacred Scriptures : but I shall not take this for granted ; I shall offer some illustrations of the evidence on which it rests. From the end of the second century I shall trace back the history of the books and of the story which they contain, until we reach the generation of Christians that received the Christian Gospel from the original apostles.

It will not, I fear, be very easy to present the argument in a form that will be always and immediately intelligible to an audience unfamiliar with these inquiries and unfamiliar with the history of the Christian Church in the second century ; I shall be able to state only a part of the historical evidence by which the trustworthiness of the Gospels is sustained ; other lines of evidence, some of which cannot be conclusive except to scholars, must be wholly set aside. I will do what I can.

But I may be told that, even when I have proved that the story is the story which was told by Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, and Philip, and Matthew, and the other apostles of Christ, I have not made my position secure. Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Matthew, and the rest, were they men to be trusted ? For myself I do not care to vindicate their integrity and trustworthiness ; but if

the Four Gospels contain the story which they told of the Master whom they worshipped, their integrity is apparent, and their trustworthiness needs no vindication. And as I am fully convinced that they told this story, I believe that our Lord delivered the Sermon on the Mount and the great discourse in the upper room in Jerusalem; and that He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb, raised from the dead the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain, and called Lazarus from the grave after he had been dead four days.

I

But there is a preliminary question to be considered: *How are we to approach the consideration of the evidence that the Four Gospels contain the story of our Lord which was told by His apostles and friends?* The answer to that question may determine the issue of the whole investigation; one answer to it would, for all practical purposes, make the investigation irrelevant and unnecessary.

Let me explain what I mean. Of all recent theories assailing the historical trustworthiness of the Gospels, those of Strauss and of Ferdinand Baur are the most famous. Strauss does

not begin by inquiring into the strength of the evidence by which the Christian story is supported ; he denies that any evidence can make it credible. Miracles, he says, are impossible ; the Gospels attribute miracles to our Lord Jesus Christ ; therefore the Gospels cannot be historically trustworthy. His examination of the evidence for the early date of the Gospels is extremely slight. His main business was, not to discover whether there is evidence that the story is true, but to account for its origin, supposing it to be false. When he published the first edition of his *Life of Jesus*, he was unwilling to attribute the story to deliberate invention ; he thought that he could explain how myths and legends about Jesus of Nazareth were likely to spring up spontaneously in the fervent imagination and vehement devotion of the second and third generations of His disciples ; and he believed that these mythical and legendary narratives were regarded by the unknown authors of the Four Gospels as trustworthy traditions of our Lord's earthly history.

The object of Strauss was to account for the origin of the *story*. In the judgment of Ferdinand Baur, Strauss's theory did not account for the *books* which contain the story. It failed to account for the books which bear

the names of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It failed still more flagrantly to account for the Gospel of John. That Gospel cannot be treated as a collection of mythical narratives which had sprung up spontaneously among devout and fervent Christian people. It is a theological treatise, with a regular plan and definite dogmatic purposes. According to Baur, it represents a certain " tendency " of thought ; and he therefore assigns it to a time, late in the second century, when, as he thinks, it was natural that a Gospel with such a " tendency " should have been written. He distributes dates to the other three Gospels on the same principle. He thinks that, while the Gospels embody many popular traditions of Christ, to which the imagination and devotion of the Church had given a miraculous character, the four unknown writers felt themselves free to invent additional miracles in order to add to the force and impressiveness of their narratives. They felt themselves equally free to invent discourses which would support certain theological and controversial positions, and to attribute them to our Lord.

It is sometimes said that Christian men enter on the investigation of the evidence for the authority of the writings of the New Testament

with their minds already made up, because these writings are the foundation of their faith. I have tried to show that, whether or not the New Testament writings can be proved to be trustworthy on historical grounds, our faith in Christ remains unshaken. But the charge may be retorted on the assailants of traditional beliefs. Strauss begins his *Life of Jesus* with the dogma—a dogma for which he offers no proof, and for which, as far as I know, nothing of the nature of proof has ever been offered—that miracles are impossible. His conclusion is therefore reached before the inquiry is begun. The verdict is given before a witness is called. Baur's conception of the history of the rise of the Christian Church rests on the assumption that miracles lie outside the limits of history, and that the origin of the Christian faith is to be accounted for without inquiring into the reality of the miracles attributed to our Lord, or even into the reality of our Lord's resurrection.

If we are to begin our investigation with these assumptions, the investigation has a purely academical interest. Assume that the story cannot be true, and no practical end is to be attained by inquiring whether our Gospels contain the story which was told by the original apostles of our Lord.

Nor are we likely to reach any satisfactory conclusion if we isolate the story from the preceding history of the Jewish race to which our Lord Jesus Christ belonged, or from the history of the Christian Faith, of which He was the Founder. In other words, we ought to take into account *all* the facts that have any real bearing on our investigation. But through mere inconsiderateness, our Lord's earthly history is often torn away from great masses of facts in which it is embedded, and to which it organically belongs.

Many people seem to suppose that they may approach the subject as if the Lord Jesus Christ had appeared in Spain or in China, instead of in Judæa and Galilee, and as if after His crucifixion and alleged resurrection no great changes had taken place in the religious thought and life of mankind. They seem to suppose that the whole proof of the trustworthiness of the Four Gospels has been exhausted when they have gone through certain quotations from Christian and heretical writers belonging to the second century. They isolate our Lord's earthly life from all that preceded it and from all that has followed it. They treat it as though it were wholly sporadic. This is contrary to sound historical principles. The story

fits in with known facts. It is rooted in a great antecedent history. Its supernatural elements are vitally related to the actual order of the world, and are necessary to account for some of the greatest events in the subsequent history of mankind.

I shall now state some of the more obvious considerations which, as I think, should be present to our mind when we enter on this inquiry.

II

We are separated from the Lord Jesus Christ by more than eighteen hundred years. There is no doubt that this vast interval creates many difficulties in the way of ascertaining with certainty whether the story of His life which has come down to us is trustworthy. We cannot deal with it, and with the evidence which may be alleged for it, as if we were living at the close of the second century or the beginning of the third. Early Christian writings, containing materials of great importance in relation to this inquiry, are known to us only by extracts and allusions. Others have wholly disappeared. Further, in the time of Irenæus, of Tertullian, and of Clement of Alexandria, the force of the tradition of Christ was still strong. Great

masses of evidence, by which *they* were assured that the Four Gospels contained a true account of our Lord, are irrecoverably lost. It is impossible for us to place ourselves in the position of those who were living so near to the apostolic age.

But if much has been lost, much has been gained. We approach this inquiry through those great achievements of the Christian Faith which extend over the intervening centuries. We know the power which it has exerted over the religious, ethical, and intellectual life of the most highly civilized nations in the world. It has given them august conceptions of God. It has exalted their conception of the dignity of man. It has rescued from neglect and dishonour some of the most gracious and beautiful of human virtues; it has allied the awful and tender sanctions of religion with the common duties of morality. It has given fire and dignity to literature and art. It has inspired a heroism of devotion to the service of the sick, the miserable, and the fallen. It has created in saints a passion for holiness. Through century after century, and in many lands, it has disciplined millions of obscure men to honesty, temperance, patience, kindliness, cheerful con-

tentment, and all the virtues which contribute to the happiness of private citizens, and to the peace, order, and progress of states. It has consoled men in their sorrows; it has given them hope in death.

These are among the obvious and uncontested effects of the power of the Christian Faith. They should be remembered—they should be taken into account—when we are considering the evidence for the truth of the story which has come down to us of the earthly history of its Founder. What might be incredible if it were told us of another man, who had done nothing to change the fortunes of the world, may be credible of Him. If miracles could do anything to deepen the impression produced by His personal force and by His teaching—anything to confirm the faith, the loyalty, and the courage of His allies and agents in the earliest movements of so immense and beneficent a revolution; if, on the hypothesis that He was more than man—and this has been the faith of His disciples from the very beginning—miracles could contribute anything to the illustration of His superhuman greatness; if, on the hypothesis that He had come to be the Saviour, not merely the teacher, of the human race—and this too has always been part

of the very substance of the Christian Gospel—miracles could contribute anything to the illustration of the true nature of His mission: then there were adequate reasons for their occurrence, and they have achieved their purpose.

The power of the miracles attributed to our Lord was not exhausted in the impression which they are said to have produced on the people who witnessed them; nor, in later ages, has their chief service consisted in the evidence which they offer that He was sent of God. It has been one of the chief glories of the Christian Faith that it has taught men to care for the sick and the suffering. Even in the most corrupt times of the most corrupt Churches, the obligation to relieve all forms of human misery has never been wholly forgotten. It belongs to the very essence of Christian ethics; for a Christian Church to deny it would be as impossible as for a Christian Church to deny the Unity of God or the reality of judgment to come. Nor has the recognition of the obligation been ineffective. Christian men have had a passion of pity for wretchedness, and in every country of Christendom great foundations of charity have been created in obedience to the authority of Christ and in imitation of His example.

"In obedience to the authority of Christ and

in imitation of His example." But how is the authority expressed? and in what facts has the example been given? Where has Christendom learnt that it follows Christ by feeding the poor; by building hospitals for the sick, asylums for the aged, for the deaf, the dumb, and the blind; by giving shelter and aid to every description of physical infirmity and misery? Cancel the miracles, and how much remains to account for the great—I might almost say the supreme—place which this duty of showing mercy to the miserable has held in the thought and life of the Church through all the Christian centuries?

The miracles of Christ have given the law to Christian charity. Thousands of lepers have felt the touch of a kindly hand, and have had their sufferings soothed by human tenderness, because it has been believed that Christ was moved with compassion when He saw the leper of Galilee, and healed him. Millions of hungry men and women and children have been fed, because it has been believed that Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes. Thousands of hospitals and asylums have been built, tens of thousands of Christian men and women have devoted their lives to the service and relief of human misery, because it has been believed

that Christ healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb. I cannot refuse to the glorious ministries of Christian charity a place in the consideration of the question whether the miracles attributed to Christ were really wrought by Him. I see that a confident belief that He wrought them has been the inspiration and the law of some of the fairest of those great works in which the characteristic spirit of the Christian Faith has been illustrated. It was worth while to work the miracles ; for in every age, and in every land, and in the hearts of a great multitude that no man can number, they have opened fountains of compassion for human suffering. It was worth while to work them ; for they are the origin of the relief and consolation which have lessened the pains and soothed the wretchedness of countless millions of the human race.

III

There is another very obvious characteristic of the Christian Faith which has a very close relation to this inquiry. Christendom, according to Mr. Emerson, has " dwelt with noxious exaggeration on the Person of Christ." Had

Christendom gone further in the "exaggeration" of its devotion to Him, Christendom would have been stronger and nobler. But the criticism points to a fact of infinite significance. In the religion of Christ, Christ is the larger part of the religion. Here the Prophet is greater than the prophecy, the Messenger of God is greater than the message. It has been so from the beginning. Within five-and-twenty or thirty years after His crucifixion He was spoken of by His disciples as being in a high and unique sense the Son of God; and "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" was associated with "the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost" in an apostolic benediction. His disciples believed that his death was a great and critical event in the history of the whole human race: "One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died, and rose again." That conception of His death reveals a conception of His Person which is "dark with excess of light." What must He have been in whose death the whole race "died," and through whose resurrection the whole race may "live unto God." His crucifixion was an awful crime: and yet we

are "justified by His blood," and through Him we are to be saved from "the wrath," the wrath of the Eternal. And, further, the Saviour of the world is also the Judge of the world; all men are to "be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to that which he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

This, it may be said, is Paul's conception of Christ; but we have Paul's word for it that, when he had "laid before" James and Peter and John the Gospel that he preached among the Gentiles, they gave him "the right hand of fellowship," and acknowledged that he had been "entrusted with the Gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the Gospel of the circumcision"; they preached in substance the same Gospel—Peter to the Jews, Paul to the Gentiles.

The Apocalypse—written only a few years later, and written by the Apostle John, as many of those acknowledge who refuse to accept the Gospels as genuine—contains conceptions of Christ not inferior in majesty. He is coming "with the clouds: and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him; and all tribes of the earth shall mourn over

Him." The angels of heaven, and the Church, and the "living creatures," are represented as saying "with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Nor is this all: "Every created thing which is in the heavens, and on the earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion for ever and ever." Christ is "King of kings and Lord of lords." The death of Christ is as wonderful in the Apocalypse as in the Epistles of Paul. The four and twenty elders "sing a new song, saying, Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation." John, who knew Christ "after the flesh," John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," attributes to Christ a glory as great as that which is attributed to Him by the apostle to whom He appeared "last of all, as unto one born out of due time."

That during His earthly life His disciples did not know how great He was is certain;

but is it conceivable that there were no premonitions of the discovery which came to them after His ascension to heaven? The miracles attributed to Him in the Gospels—miracles which He worked in His own power—harmonize with the conception of His transcendent greatness which appears in the Apocalypse of John, and in the uncontested Epistles of Paul. They contributed to the foundation on which such a conception might be built. If during His earthly life Christ exerted no greater powers than belong to man, it is hard to understand how His friends were prepared to recognize in Him, when He had returned to the Father, the glory of the eternal Son of God.

IV

Again: our Lord belonged to a race which had reached a very great and a very noble conception of God. It is unnecessary to discuss contested questions of Old Testament criticism. The Jewish prophets—this is certain—were filled with awe in the presence of the Eternal; they worshipped and feared Him as infinitely great and infinitely glorious; and He was a God in whose righteousness and mercy men might perfectly trust. Their religious faith

was the inspiration and the support of a lofty morality. Kings and people were warned that no prayers or sacrifices could shelter them from the anger of Jehovah if they were guilty of injustice, cruelty, and oppression: "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

And for many generations the Jewish people had been expecting the coming of a great Prophet, a great Prince,—the Servant, the Messenger, the Representative of Jehovah. Our Lord, according to the Four Gospels, claimed to be the Christ of Jewish prophecy and hope; and if the representation of Him given in the Gospels and in the other New Testament writings is true, the prophecy and the hope have been wonderfully fulfilled. He is not indeed the Christ that either the people or the prophets expected; but He is infinitely greater. He is a Prophet whose Divine commission has been acknowledged by great nations for many centuries; a Prince

who has commanded in many lands, and for more than sixty generations, an absolute obedience and a passionate loyalty such as were never given during this brief earthly life, and within the boundaries of a single state, to the greatest of earthly sovereigns.

It is extremely remarkable, to say the least, that so singular a hope should have received—or should appear to have received—so singular a fulfilment. It is extremely remarkable that the enduring sovereignty over great nations, which, according to Jewish hope, was to be achieved by their Messiah, has been actually achieved by One of their own race and achieved in a far loftier form than their prophets had anticipated. It is extremely remarkable that the sovereignty should have fallen to One whose earthly history was wholly unlike what the Jewish people had supposed would be the earthly history of their Messiah —so unlike, that to have constructed the story of Christ, in its substance and its decisive events, out of the popular expectation would have been impossible. And what, for our present purpose, is most remarkable of all, is that the story as told in the Gospels, including the manifestation of our Lord's miraculous power, forms a perfect transition from the ancient hope of

the Jewish people to its transcendent accomplishment in the present glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

V

It is my contention that these considerations cannot be reasonably disregarded in our judgment on the evidence for the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels. The main objections—I might say the only objection—to their trustworthiness rests on the miraculous events which they record. In judging whether it is possible and probable that the miracles were wrought, we are bound to take into account the whole of the Christian case.

Hardly any conceivable strength of testimony would convince us that miracles were wrought in England three or four hundred years ago by a man who was remembered only by the miracles that were attributed to him. If it were affirmed, even by contemporary witnesses whose good faith we had no reason to doubt, that such a man had healed the sick, given sight to the blind, raised the dead—a man in whose personality and character and life, so far as they were known to us from the narratives which recorded his miraculous works, there was nothing wonderful, nothing

unique, nothing that created the irresistible impression that he was nearer to God than other men; a man who had originated no great reformation in the moral and religious condition of mankind, had given to the race no loftier and more affecting conceptions of God, had done nothing to deepen the reverence of men for God's righteousness, nothing to make them the heirs of a larger blessedness in God's love; a man from whom there had come no loftier, more gracious, or more generous ideal of human goodness, no new force to sustain us in duty, no new consolations to soothe us in sorrow;—if, I say, it were affirmed by his friends, men apparently intelligent and truthful, that such a man had worked miracles, their testimony would constitute a curious historical problem, to which we might be unable to find any solution; but it would not command our belief. In this imaginary case the alleged miracles would be sporadic, isolated, not woven into the texture of the actual history of mankind.

According to the Christian case, the miracles of Christ have their place in that history. They belong to the life and work of One who has changed, and changed immeasurably for the better, the moral and religious condition

of great nations, and whose power after the lapse of eighteen centuries is still unspent. In the narratives which record the miracles of Christ the miracles are not the most wonderful elements: His teaching, His unique Personality, the Divine perfection revealed under human conditions in His character and history, are more wonderful still. Finally, His appearance has proved to be the transcendent fulfilment of a great hope which, for many centuries, had been the stay, the strength, and the consolation of the race from which He sprang, a race to which had come an exceptional knowledge of God. That Christ should have worked miracles does not surprise me. It would have surprised me if He had not.

VI

As for those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ for ourselves, and who know that He is the living Lord and Saviour of men, the Way to the Father, the Giver of eternal life, our own experience—confirmed by the experience of Christian men of all Churches and all ages—prevents us from finding anything incredible in the miracles which He is alleged to have wrought during His earthly ministry.

If you know for yourselves the living and

glorified Christ, if you have found God in Him, it you have entered into the actual and conscious possession of the blessings of the Christian redemption, you will see no reason for doubting the historical trustworthiness of the Four Gospels, because they declare that, during our Lord's earthly life, He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. "He has done greater things than these," "whereof we all are witnesses."

Strauss began his investigation by assuming that miracles are impossible, and that therefore the story of the Gospels cannot be trustworthy. We begin the investigation by assuming that miracles are possible, because the living God is greater than the forces of the material universe; and that, as we know that Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of men, it is probable that, even during the years of His earthly humiliation, gracious works, which God alone could achieve, revealed His transcendent greatness. The assumption that the miracles of Christ are impossible is an assumption absolutely without support; the assumption that it is probable that He wrought them rests on the personal experience of innumerable Christian men, and on the triumphs and glories of the Christian Faith.

LECTURE VI

EUSEBIUS

IN the argument which I propose to submit to you to show that the story of our Lord contained in our Four Gospels is the story which was told by the original apostles, it may appear at first sight—though this is an error which I hope to remove—that no evidence drawn from writings belonging to the second half of the second century can have any weight. But the whole amount of the Christian literature produced before A.D. 150, apart from the books of the New Testament, seems to have been inconsiderable; and of that which was produced a large part has unfortunately been lost. Enough however remains to give the Gospels solid and secure support.

And the lost books are not wholly unknown to us. Early in the fourth century an eminent scholar, a famous bishop, Eusebius of Cæsarea, wrote a history of the Church from the apostolic

age to his own; and in this he gives many extracts from writings which have long disappeared, though copies of some of them may, perhaps, still lie hidden in Eastern monasteries, and may yet be recovered.

I.

Eusebius was born not much later than A.D. 260. The place of his birth is uncertain; but he submitted to the Council of Nicæa a confession of faith which he said that he had been taught at Cæsarea when he was a child and while he was a catechumen. His earliest associations were with that city; there he was baptized; there he became a presbyter; there too, soon after A.D. 313, he became bishop; and he was bishop of Cæsarea at his death A.D. 339 or 340.

In his youth he was the friend of learned men, especially of Pamphilus, a fellow presbyter, who was a passionate disciple of Origen of Alexandria. He had access to great libraries: the library of Pamphilus, which was of extraordinary extent and value; and the library collected during the first half of the third century by Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem. His industry must have been immense; he published more than thirty treatises—histori-

cal, apologetic, doctrinal, critical, and exegetical, besides orations and sermons. His great position at the Council of Nicæa was due, no doubt, first of all, to the intimacy of his relations with the emperor. He alone of the Eastern prelates could tell what was in the emperor's mind; "he was the clerk of the imperial closet; he was the interpreter, the chaplain, the confessor of Constantine." [1] But he was also "beyond question the most learned man and the most famous living writer in the Church at that time." [2]

Before the meeting of the council he had intervened on behalf of Arius, and had remonstrated with Alexander of Alexandria for deposing him. By the more vehement enemies of Arianism he was regarded with great distrust. When the creed of Cæsarea, which he proposed to the council, had been modified by the introduction into the Nicene Creed of the clauses declaring the Son to be "of the substance of the Father," "begotten not made," and "of the same substance" (*homoousion*) with the Father, Eusebius hesitated whether he should subscribe it. He did not like the new

[1] Stanley: *Eastern Church*, p. 102.
[2] Lightfoot: "Eusebius of Cæsarea": *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. ii., p. 312.

terms ; the old creed of his baptism was sufficiently explicit for him ; nor did he like the anathema appended to the creed condemning Arianism. But after a day's consideration he signed with the rest, and in a letter to the people of Cæsarea he explained that, " though he would resist to the last any vital change in the traditional creed of his Church, he had nevertheless subscribed to these alterations, when assured of their innocence, to avoid appearing contentious." [1]

The truth seems to be that he was a man tolerant of theological differences, profoundly convinced that neither human language nor human thought can define the mysteries of the eternal life of God ; and he was very reluctant to deal hardly with friends of his who had been caught by the bold speculations of Arius. For himself, he held the traditional faith ; but he did not see that Arianism cut it up by the roots.

If we were to describe him in the current language of our own times, we should say that he was a Broad Churchman, orthodox, but not inclined to be rigorous in exacting from other men an acceptance of the orthodox

[1] Lightfoot : " Eusebius of Cæsarea ": *Dictionary of Christian Biography,* vol. ii., p. 313.

definitions ; and that in his intellectual temper and habits he was a scholar and literary man, rather than a theologian.

II

In his time there were seven of the books included in our New Testament about whose apostolic authority the opinion of the Churches was divided ; and in writing his *History* Eusebius proposed, as one of his objects, to make some contribution towards a decision of their claims.

The books of the New Testament, as you know, were written by different authors, in different countries, at different times. There are many questions to be asked about them : When were they separated from all other Christian writings and placed in a class by themselves as being the " Sacred Scriptures " of the Christian Faith ? By whose authority was the selection made ? On what grounds were some books finally included, others finally rejected ? These are subjects which you will find discussed in histories of the New Testament canon.

From such treatises you will learn that, towards the end of the second century, and at least as early as A.D. 185, a unique and sacred

authority was attributed to nearly all the writings contained in our New Testament. "The Scriptures are perfect, inasmuch as they were uttered by the Word of God and His Spirit." This is the testimony of Irenæus; and by the Scriptures he means the books of the Old Testament and, with a few inconsiderable exceptions, about which opinion was divided, the books of the New. With these exceptions, our New Testament books had been received by the Christian Church as authoritative and sacred for at least twenty years before the close of the second century; and they were regarded by the Christians of that age with a reverence as deep as our own.

For Christians of the generation to which Irenæus belonged, Christians living in every part of the empire, our Four Gospels—no other "Gospels"—contained the authoritative story of our Lord's Life and the authoritative record of His teaching. Our Acts of the Apostles—no other "Acts"—contained the authoritative history of the early years of the Christian Church. They accepted the Epistles of Paul, which have a place in our own New Testament, the First Epistle of Peter, and the First Epistle of John, as containing the

authoritative teaching of apostles who spoke in the name of Christ.

These books had been separated from all others, not by the decree of a council or in submission to the judgment of a great theologian or bishop, but by the general consent of Christian Churches in every part of the world. The process had been a silent one. No one can tell how the result had been brought about. But it is certain that, about the year A.D. 180, the books which I have enumerated were regarded as "the Christian Scriptures," as books written under Divine inspiration and having Divine authority; and they had their place side by side with the books of the Old Testament.

Concerning the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistles of James and Jude, the Second Epistle of Peter, the Second and Third Epistles of John, there was not, in that early age, the same unanimity of judgment. The Apocalypse, which was generally received at the close of the second century, was regarded with serious distrust in the third. The apostolic origin of some of these seven disputed books was acknowledged by the Churches of one country and denied by the Churches of another. Eminent scholars and bishops differed about

them. No attempt was made for a long time to determine the question by authority.[1]

III

Eusebius, as I have said, proposed in his *History* to make some contribution towards the settlement of the claims of these disputed books, by showing what use had been made of them in the earlier ages of the Church. He also proposed to record anything interesting that he might discover concerning the books which were universally received by the Church. But he draws a very clear distinction between the way in which he intends to deal with the two classes of writings. He promises that, if he finds in any Church writer a *quotation* from a disputed book, or a *reference* to a disputed book, he will call attention to it. Every such quotation or reference would illustrate the authority which the book held in the judgment of an earlier generation of Christians, and would assist to determine its claims to be included among the sacred Scriptures. But to give quotations from the undisputed books, and references to them, was unnecessary: the authority of these books was not doubtful,

[1] Note A in Appendix.

it was universally acknowledged. If however he found in early Christian writers any interesting *statement* or *information*, either about the books which were universally received, or about the other seven, he promises to give it a place in his *History*.

His general principle would not have required him to call attention to any mere *references* to the First Epistle of John or the First Epistle of Peter; their genuineness had always been acknowledged. But, as a matter of fact, he does call attention to the references to those Epistles which are found in some early writers. "He may have thought," says Dr. Lightfoot, "that this would conduce to a just estimate of the meaning of silence in the case of disputed Epistles, as 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John." [1]

Eusebius was a man of large learning. He had access to some of the best libraries of Christian literature that existed in his time. Many books which are now lost were in his hands. From some of them he gives interesting and important extracts. It was his declared purpose to collect and to record whatever information he found in earlier

[1] *Essays on the Work entitled "Supernatural Religion,"* p. 47.

Christian writers, both concerning the seven disputed books and the books which had secured their place among the sacred books of the Church. He was a fair-minded man, with the instincts and habits of a scholar. But throughout his *History* there is no hint that any uncertainty had ever existed in the Church with regard to the authority of the Four Gospels. There is nothing to suggest that they had first appeared after the death of the men whose names they bear. It is inconceivable that Christian Churches independent of each other, inheriting different traditions, and situated in different countries, would have come to accept these four books as the genuine writings of Matthew and John, Mark and Luke, if they had appeared for the first time, and without explanation, when Matthew and John, Mark and Luke, had all passed away. And if any explanation of their late appearance had been given, it is also inconceivable that no trace of it should have survived. In the Christian writings which have come down to us there is no hint of any such explanation. If any hint of it had existed in the writings which are now lost, but which Eusebius possessed, he would certainly have told us about it.

IV.

Take the Gospel of John. If a book of such immense theological importance as the Fourth Gospel had appeared, for the first time, thirty, forty, or fifty years after John's death, can we imagine that its claims would have been unchallenged? Would no Church writer have expressed a wish for some account of its history? Would no question have been asked as to the reasons why, if it had really been written by the apostle, it had not been given to the Church thirty, forty, fifty years before? Down to the middle of the second century, and later, there were Christian bishops living in different parts of the world who in their early years had known John or the friends of John: would they not have wanted to learn how it was that a Gospel of which they had never heard had appeared with John's name? And would not the unknown writer who had had the courage to attribute his fictitious Gospel to the apostle have also had the courage to give some fictitious answer to these inquiries? Would not the miraculous ingenuity which enabled him to write a story of Christ, which during so many centuries has commanded the wonder and awe of mankind, have been equal

to the invention of a tale concerning the manner in which the book had been preserved, and the grounds for delaying its publication, which would have had an irresistible fascination and charm,—a tale far too beautiful and too pathetic to have passed out of the memory of the Church ?

If any questions about the book had been asked, if any answers had been given, Eusebius would have told us about them ; for he promises to mention what has been said by earlier writers concerning the undisputed books as well as about the disputed books. He makes a specific promise to mention what they have said about the Four Gospels.[1] But of any such inquiries as those I have suggested about the Gospel of John, of any such explanation as those inquiries must have drawn out, he says nothing.

V

That this Gospel would have been received by the Church without controversy, if it had appeared twenty or thirty years after the death of John, is incredible, when we consider the contents of the Gospel itself and the controversies by which the Church was harassed

[1] *Ecclesiastical History*, book iii., cap. xxiv.

throughout the second century. Gnosticism destroyed the power of the Gospel by changing it into a philosophy. By those who were contending earnestly for "the faith once for all delivered to the saints," it was regarded with intense hostility. But among the technical words of this formidable heresy are the very words which hold so conspicuous a place in John's Gospel, "Only Begotten," "Life," "Truth," "Grace," "Fulness," "the Word," "Light." Did the Gnostics get these words from John? or did the unknown writer of the Fourth Gospel get them from the Gnostics? The words are just as characteristic of the Gospel attributed to John as of the system taught by Valentinus the Gnostic, though in John they have a different power. Who used them first, the writer of the Fourth Gospel or Valentinus?

If the Fourth Gospel had appeared for the first time at any date after 120 A.D., what chance would it have had of being received by those who were fighting Gnosticism as the deadly foe of the Christian Church? To take a parallel case, suggested by Professor Salmon, of Dublin[1]: suppose that when the contro-

[1] "You might as well conceive some one who wanted a document to be accepted as authoritative

versy of the Reformation was at the hottest, it had been announced that the manuscript of an Epistle of Paul, previously unknown, had just been discovered in some ancient library; suppose that when the manuscript was published, it was found to be full of such words as "transubstantiation," "purgatory," "indulgences," would not every Protestant have rejected it as a forgery? Suppose that the Epistle had been published and accepted as genuine ten, twenty, thirty years before Luther nailed his theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg, would not the outbreak of the Reformation have provoked a fierce controversy concerning its genuineness?

If the Fourth Gospel had appeared as late as 120 A.D., when Gnosticism was becoming very powerful, the Churches which held fast the traditional faith would never have acknowledged its authority. If at that date it had been only recently received as the work of an apostle—received within the previous twenty years, and received on inadequate evidence —its authority would certainly have been

by us Protestants stuffing it with Roman Catholic technical words, transubstantiation, purgatory, and such like."—Salmon: *Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 71 (first edition).

challenged, and some trace of the controversy would certainly have survived.

But I repeat that, in the Christian writings of the second century which are in our own hands, there is no trace of any controversy on the genuineness of John's Gospel; and the silence of Eusebius assures us that there was no trace of any controversy on this subject in the Christian writings, now lost, which he found in the library of his friend Pamphilus, or in the library of Bishop Alexander at Jerusalem. The inference seems to me irresistible. There was never any controversy concerning the genuineness of the Gospel of John because there was never any uncertainty about it; and there was never any uncertainty about it because it was published in John's lifetime, and all John's friends knew that it was his.[1]

[1] It is hardly necessary to say that the argument in this Lecture was suggested by Dr. Lightfoot's remarkable chapter on "The Silence of Eusebius" in his *Essays on a Work entitled "Supernatural Religion"*; and the notes to the lecture indicate how much I am indebted to it. But the argument is not identical with that of Dr. Lightfoot, and I must not make his great name responsible for it.

LECTURE VII

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA AND TERTULLIAN

THAT at the close of the second century all Christian Churches received our Four Gospels as the authoritative records of the earthly Life and Ministry of our Lord is not contested by any school of criticism. Nor is it contested that, at that time, these Four Gospels were universally attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. To ourselves this is a fact of immense importance.

I

For when we look back to the early days of the Christian Faith, to the times when men were still living who had seen and heard the writers of our sacred books, had received the Christian Gospel from their teaching, had known them as their personal friends, had talked with them in private about the miracles of Christ, His discourses, His sufferings, and His resurrection, the distance seems

immense. The imagination is oppressed by the intervening centuries. How can we make our way through all the confusions and uncertainties of this vast tract of time? But of these eighteen hundred years, we can pass over seventeen hundred at a single stride. We have in our hands the writings of Irenæus of Lyons, of Tertullian of Carthage, of Clement and Origen[1] of Alexandria; and they attribute the Four Gospels to the same authors to whom we attribute them; they regard them with the same reverence. Is it possible to believe that this general consent rested on no solid foundations?

[1] The late Dr. Tregelles, an eminent and most painstaking New Testament scholar, says of Origen, who was born in A.D. 185 and died in A.D. 254: "In his writings he makes such extensive use of the New Testament, that, although a very large number of his works are lost, and many others have come down to us only in defective Latin versions, we can in his extant Greek writings alone (I speak this from actual knowledge and examination) find cited at least two-thirds of the New Testament; so that had such a thing been permitted as that the Gospels and some of the other books should have been lost, we might restore them in a great measure by means of the quotations in Origen."—*Lecture on the Historic Evidence of the Authorship and Transmission of the Books of the New Testament* (1853), p. 14.

Let the question be put in another form, a form suggested by the latest account that has been given of these sacred books by those who deny that they are genuine. At the *close* of the second century these four narratives had secured in all Christian Churches a place as great, as authoritative, as sacred, as that which they hold now: is it possible to believe that they could have won this universal recognition if they had been written by unknown men, in unknown places, at unknown times, during the first half of that same century, and after all the apostles and all who belonged to the first generation of Christians were dead? There are two considerations which make it infinitely improbable: 1, The *wide area* over which, in very early times, Christian Churches were planted; and, 2, Their *mutual independence* of each other.

1. Within thirty years after the death of our Lord there were Churches in Jerusalem, in Cæsarea, in the Syrian Antioch, and in Rome. There were Churches in the heart of Asia Minor and in the great cities on the coast. There were Churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Our materials for constructing the history of the diffusion

of the Christian Faith during the next forty years are inconsiderable; but early in the second century we find that there were large numbers of Christians in the north of Asia Minor. Pliny had been sent into the province by Trajan, and he wrote to the emperor to learn how he is to treat those who are guilty of believing in this strange superstition. The "crime" had continued to spread even while the persecution was going on. If he is still to punish those who persisted in it, he tells the emperor that a great number of persons are in danger of suffering. "For many of all ages and every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also and the open country." Pliny thinks that by a wise policy it may be restrained and corrected. "It is certain," he says, "that the temples, which were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented. And the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims likewise are everywhere bought up, whereas for some time there were few purchasers." He thinks that many "might be reclaimed if pardon were granted to those who shall repent." That letter was written before

A.D. 105. Fifty years later the Christian Gospel had spread so widely, that Justin, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* says, "There exists not a people, whether Greek or barbarian or any other race of men, by whatsoever appellation they may be distinguished, whether they dwell under tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things." Gibbon, who quotes the passage, has no doubt a right to call it "a splendid exaggeration, which even at present it would be extremely difficult to reconcile with the real state of mankind"; but Justin would hardly have ventured on so glowing a statement, if it had not been notorious that the new Faith had won great triumphs in many remote parts of the world. Indeed, we know, from other sources, that before the middle of the second century there were Christian Churches in nearly all the provinces of the empire.

2. These Churches were not under any central authority. The Apostle Paul, during his lifetime, maintained a vigilant supervision over the Churches which he had founded in Asia and in Europe; but he died more

than thirty years before the end of the first century. John must have exerted an immense influence over the Churches of Asia Minor, but he died about the beginning of the second century. The age of general councils had not come. As yet the bishop of Rome was not the ruler of Western Christendom. The Churches stood apart. They had friendly relations with each other, but they were not bound together in one great ecclesiastical organization. No theologian, in the second century, rose to the ascendency which belonged to Augustine in the fifth. Ancient Churches, founded by apostles, were regarded with reverence, and the Roman Church had the additional influence derived from its position in the imperial city; but neither Antioch nor Rome had authority over the rest of Christendom. The Churches followed their own traditions; if they modified them, it was in fraternal deference to Churches which they believed had been more faithful to the apostolic rule—not in forced submission to any external authority. Towards the end of the second century there was a sharp controversy between the East and the West on the observance of Easter.

How then are we to explain the fact that,

many years before 200 A.D., all these Churches —Churches composed of men of different races, Churches separated from each other by mountains and seas, Churches in Rome and Churches in Asia Minor, Churches in Gaul and Churches in Northern Africa— received the Four Gospels as sacred Scriptures, and believed that they were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? I repeat that no great theologian, whose fame extended from the East to the West, drew these remote and independent societies into agreement. Difference of judgment was not suppressed, consent was not compelled by the canon of a council or by the authority of a pope. How came the Churches to agree?

There can, I think, be only one answer to this question. The Gospels must have been written and received before the first generation of Christians had wholly passed away. Had any of them appeared for the first time at a later date, ancient Churches which had been founded by apostles would have refused to acknowledge them. If, here and there, a Church had been deceived, Churches elsewhere would have protested against the fraud. The universal reception of the Gospels before 200 A.D. is a proof that they could not

have been written by unknown authors between 100 A.D. and 150 A.D.

II

From the argument resting on the general consent of the Churches at the close of the second century, I pass to the consideration of the value of the special evidence which is given by two eminent men of that age—Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian of Carthage. The two men, in their intellectual and religious life, were extremely unlike; and they represent Christian communities having very different characteristics and very different traditions.

The city of Alexandria had long been famous for its immense Library, the literary glory of the ancient world; and for its Museum —or, as we should say, its University—in which crowds of students from distant countries listened to illustrious professors whose names have not yet perished. The general population consisted of men of all races, and the Alexandrian schools were hospitable to the learning and speculation of all lands. It was there that the bold attempt was made to blend and to fuse Greek and Oriental thought, and to discover in the books of

Moses the last and highest results of the philosophy of Paganism. Literature, grammar, criticism; mathematics, astronomy, medicine—whatever a man cared to study, he could study under great masters and in company with enthusiastic comrades.

As early as the beginning of the second century the number of Christians in the city was very large; among them Basilides and Valentinus, and other teachers of Gnosticism, found some of their earliest adherents. The Christian Church caught the Alexandrian spirit. Towards the end of the century the great Christian school of Alexandria, the Catechetical School, became the centre of the intellectual assault of the Church on the thought of the pagan world. The school was open from morning to night, without charge, to men and women alike. Where the intellectual life of the world was keenest, most intense, most adventurous, Christian scholars determined with intrepid confidence to demonstrate the transcendent glory of the wisdom revealed to the world in Christ. Nor were their resources unequal to their task. Over this school Clement presided for about thirteen years (A.D. 190–203).

It is probable, though not certain, that he

was educated at Athens, which still preserved in the second century some tradition of its ancient intellectual supremacy; and there are expressions of his from which it has been inferred that in his early life he was a heathen. The nobler forms of heathen thought had a strong attraction for him, and it was by no sudden movement that he reached perfect rest in the Christian Faith. For Clement, even when he has become master of the great Christian school at Alexandria, Plato sometimes speaks "as if divinely inspired."[1] He believes that, as God is the Author of all good things, God had given philosophy to the Greeks as He had given the law to the Jews, as a discipline of righteousness, as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. Perhaps too—it was possible—the gift came direct from the Father of all, and by the immediate illumination of the Holy Spirit;[2] or if the philosophers had derived their best knowledge from Hebrew prophets, they were but like Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven for the service of men: the light and fire were from God, by whatsoever means they were obtained.[3]

[1] *Stromata*, book i., cap. viii.
[2] *Ibid.*, book i. cap. v.
[3] *Ibid.* book i. cap. xvii.

He was clearly a man of wide and active intelligence. His sympathies were generous. We are separated from him by seventeen hundred years; but he often thinks the thoughts which we are inclined to regard as the best results of modern life and speculation. He was a man of large learning;[1] he was an eminent teacher in a learned Church; he lived in a learned city. That such a man, living and teaching within a hundred years after the death of the last of the apostles, received our Four Gospels as authentic and genuine, that he never suspected that they had been written long after the writers to whom they are attributed were dead, is in itself a strong reason for believing that, at the close of the second century, the tradition which supported their genuineness and authenticity was ancient, universal, and decisive.

To give a list of the quotations from the Four Gospels which occur in Clement's writings, in order to prove that he acknowledges their authority, is wholly unnecessary,

1 "No heathen contemporary shows such a power of memory or so wide an acquaintance with the classical literature of Greece in all its branches as Clement of Alexandria."—Lightfoot: *Essays on a Work entitled "Supernatural Religion,"* p. 269.

as unnecessary as it would be to offer similar proof that their authority is acknowledged by Mr. Spurgeon or Canon Liddon. But it may be well to show that he did not accept the authority, either of the Gospels or of the other canonical Scriptures, without inquiry. In a lost work of his—*Hypotyposes*—he collected the results of his investigations; some passages have been preserved. In this work, says Eusebius, Clement gives the tradition respecting the order of the Gospels, as derived from the oldest — or original — presbyters. "He says that those which contain the genealogies were written first; but that the Gospel of Mark was occasioned in the following manner: 'When Peter had proclaimed the word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel under the influence of the Spirit, as there was a great number present, they requested Mark, who had followed him from afar, and remembered well what he had said, to reduce these things to writing; and that, after composing the Gospel, he gave it to those who requested it of him, which, when Peter understood, he directly neither hindered nor encouraged it. But John, last of all, perceiving that what had reference to the body in the Gospel of our

Saviour' (that is, to the earthly and human side of our Lord's life and work) 'was sufficiently detailed, and being encouraged by his familiar friends and urged by the Spirit, he wrote a spiritual Gospel.'"[1] He disputes the authenticity of a saying attributed to our Lord, because, though it is contained in the Gospel according to the Egyptians —an apocryphal Gospel—it is not to be found in "any of the Four Gospels which have been handed down to us."[2]

There is another point to be considered in connexion with the testimony of Clement. He tells us that he wrote his *Stromata* as memoranda for his old age, that he might not forget the vigorous and animated discourses which he had heard in early manhood from blessed and truly remarkable men, who had preserved the tradition of the Faith derived directly from the holy apostles Peter, James, John, and Paul. It was God's will, he says, that the truth should be transmitted from its original teachers as from father to son, though few of the sons were equal to their fathers. He had met the men from

[1] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book vi. cap. xiv.

[2] *Stromata*, book iii. cap. xiii.

whom he had received the tradition in Greece, in Italy, and in the East. One was from Egypt; another was a Christian Jew whom he found in Palestine; another was born in Assyria; another, the greatest of them all—probably Pantænus—he found in Egypt; and it was when he found the last that his mind and heart reached their final rest in Christ. Through channels so various the beliefs of an earlier generation had reached him. It is hard to imagine that men who represented countries so remote, and lines of tradition which for two or three generations had been independent of each other, could have agreed to treat the Gospels as having been written by the authors whose names they bear, if these names had been attributed to forgeries produced long after the apostles and all their contemporaries had passed away.

III

From Alexandria we pass to another great African city. The city of Carthage, after its restoration under Cæsar and Augustus, rose with extraordinary rapidity to great wealth and splendour. It was inhabited by

a mixed population, composed, partly, of the descendants of the ancient Phœnician settlers, who in early times had raised their republic to a greatness which disputed the power of Rome; partly of Roman colonists; partly of strangers from many lands, drawn to the city by its immense commercial prosperity. The external forms of its civilization were derived from Rome. It became famous for its schools of rhetoric and of Roman law. But in the religious faith of the people there were deep traces of the Phœnician origin of the ancient Carthage, and their temper was as fierce as the heat of the African deserts.

The Carthaginian Church shared the intellectual and moral characteristics of the city. Intellectually it was Roman, not Oriental; practical, not speculative. Its temper was rigid and intolerant. It was capable of the most violent and passionate enthusiasm; and, in the person of its sterner sons, capable, too, of an heroic fidelity to Christ under prolonged and cruel sufferings. But when times of persecution came, many of its fanatical members proved inferior in constancy and fortitude to Christian men in other Churches, who were less ostentatious in their professions of devotion to the Faith,

and less intolerant in their denunciations of heathenism.

Of the strength and the limitations of this great Church Tertullian is the most illustrious representative. He was born in Carthage between 150 and 160 A.D. He belonged to a good family, and received an excellent education. Philosophy, history, rhetoric, and law were the subjects which had the strongest attractions for him. His parents were heathen, and he was more than thirty years of age—perhaps forty—when he received the Christian Gospel. He soon gave proof of the vehemence of his zeal and the energy and fertility of his intellect; fifteen or sixteen of his books—some of them apologetic, others controversial, others moral and ascetic—were written within seven years after his conversion.

Even these early writings were marked by great moral austerity. According to Tertullian, it was a crime for a Christian man to give any sanction, direct or indirect, to idolatry; for idolatry is the supreme sin, and includes all others: it is murder, adultery, blasphemy. It was therefore a crime to witness the performances in the theatre and the circus, for all public amusements were

associated with honours paid to the gods. It was a crime to have friendly relations with people who were in the habit of witnessing these performances. To share in the observance of the holy days of the heathen was also a crime. On some of these days it was a national custom to pay debts; on others to give presents; Tertullian contended that a Christian man should carefully avoid conforming to the custom; let him pay his debts and give his presents on days which were not devoted to the gods. To manufacture idols or to sell them was, of course, a crime. To traffic in any articles used in heathen worship was a crime. Magistrates had to discharge certain functions in relation to heathen temples; a Christian man could not therefore be a magistrate. Schoolmasters had to teach their scholars the heathen mythology, and to take part in school festivals which were held in honour of the gods; the very first payment of every pupil they consecrated to the honour of Minerva. To be a schoolmaster was therefore not consistent with loyalty to Christ.[1]

[1] But Tertullian was obliged to admit that Christians could not dispense with that general culture which was needful both for the study of the Scriptures

It is apparent from the tone and temper of Tertullian's denunciations that there were large numbers of baptized persons in Carthage who listened to this stern teaching either with indifference or with resentment. When he reached middle life he turned in despair from what he regarded as the hopeless corruption of the catholic Church — the luxury, covetousness, cowardice, worldliness of both its clergy and laity—and trusted that he had found among the Montanists the lost ideal of the perfect life.

From this time his moral teaching became still more austere. The Christians in Carthage were menaced with persecution. Was it lawful to escape persecution by flight? To Tertullian, who believed that the voice of the Spirit was heard through the prophets of Montanism, the answer was clear; for the prophets incited men to offer themselves

and the intercourse of daily life. He therefore sanctioned the attendance of Christian children at heathen schools, if they could obtain a literary education in no other way; and he trusted to the influence of the Church and the home to protect them against the contagion of heathenism. The scholars could avoid taking part in heathen festivals more easily than the teachers. See Neander: *Antignostikus*, part i. section i.

for martyrdom. "Why," they asked, "should you be ashamed of gaining glory? The opportunity is offered you when you are in peril of suffering for the name of Christ. He who is not exposed to dishonour before men will be exposed to dishonour before the Lord. Seek not to die on your beds from disease, but to die the martyr's death, that He may be glorified who suffered for you." The soul of Tertullian vibrated to that iron string. "More glorious," he exclaims, "is the soldier pierced with the javelin in battle than he who has a safe skin as a fugitive." To purchase safety with money was as shameful as to flee. The Christian man had been ransomed by Christ from the spirits of wickedness, from the darkness of this life, from eternal judgment, from everlasting death; "but *you* bargain for him with an informer, or a soldier, or some paltry thief of a ruler—under, as they say, the folds of the tunic[1]—as if *he* were stolen goods whom Christ purchased in the face of the whole world—yes, and set at liberty." No doubt Christ had said to the apostles that, when they were persecuted in one city, they were to flee to another; but they were to flee, not

[1] He means that the negotiation was clandestine.

to insure their own safety, but because the work they had to do was urgent and the time was short: "ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come."

The same austerity and sternness that he showed in his discussion of Christian ethics, and in his denunciations of clergy and laity who lived by a less severe rule than his own, appear in his treatment of heathenism. He hates it, scorns it, assaults it with incessant sarcasm and invective. In his *Apology*, which is one of his earliest writings, there are many characteristic passages. The heathen, he says, falsely charged the Christian with shameful crimes. I will show you, retorts Tertullian, that practices, open or secret, prevail among yourselves, which perhaps have rendered it possible for you to believe that similar enormities are committed by us. You attribute to your gods the most horrible offences; and those who worship them do the same things. He recites with a fierce fidelity the deeds of cruelty and of lust, which he declares were common in heathen nations. And he adds, with bitter irony, that human goodness was an insult to the divinities. "Deify your vilest criminals, if you wish to please your gods."

Clement of Alexandria was eager to find in heathen thought anticipations of the Christian Gospel; he looked into the abysses of heathen darkness with the hope of discovering some rays, however faint, of the "light which lighteth every man." Tertullian poured upon heathenism a fiery stream of insult and hatred. The contrast between the two men is complete. In their temperament and in their methods of thought they were as far from each other as the east is from the west. But they were agreed in their reverence for the Four Gospels.

On what ground Tertullian rested his belief in their authority is shown in the following passage, taken from his treatise against Marcion:

"If it is acknowledged that that is more true which is more ancient, that more ancient which is even from the beginning, that from the beginning which is from the apostles, it will in like manner assuredly be acknowledged that that has been derived by tradition from the apostles which has been preserved inviolate in the Churches of the apostles. Let us see what milk the Corinthians drank from Paul; to what rule the Galatians were recalled by his reproofs; what is read by the Philippians, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians; what is the testimony of the Romans, who are nearest to us, to whom Peter and Paul left the Gospel, and that sealed by their own blood. We have, moreover, Churches founded

by John. For even if Marcion rejects his Apocalypse, still the succession of bishops [in the seven Churches], if traced to its source, will rest on the authority of John. And the noble descent of other Churches is recognized in the same manner. I say then that among them, and not only among the apostolic Churches, but among all the Churches which are united with them in Christian fellowship, that Gospel of Luke which we earnestly defend has been maintained from its first publication."

"The same authority of the apostolic Churches will uphold the other Gospels which we have in due succession through them and according to their usage, I mean those of [the apostles] Matthew and John; although that which was published by Mark may also be maintained to be Peter's, whose interpreter Mark was: for the narrative of Luke also is generally ascribed to Paul, [since] it is allowable that that which scholars publish should be regarded as their master's work." [1]

Tertullian's contention is reasonable. The Churches which apostles had founded preserved the writings of their apostolic founders. The Churches of Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus preserved Paul's Epistles to the first generation of Christians in those cities. The Epistle to the Galatians, full of sharp rebuke to the men who received the Gospel of Paul with such enthusiasm that they would have plucked out their eyes for him, but who

[1] *Against Marcion*, iv. 5, Dr. Westcott's translation: *Canon of New Testament*, pp. 345, 346.

within a year or two were listening to "another Gospel," which was not a Gospel at all, was preserved by the Churches of Galatia. The Roman Church preserved Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The Churches founded by John preserved the writings of John. All the Four Gospels—and especially the Gospel of Luke, with which in his controversy with Marcion Tertullian was more immediately concerned—had been handed down in the same way. The sacred books were in the keeping of organized societies, whose members regarded them as the authoritative records of a Divine revelation—a revelation which was the law of their earthly conduct and the foundation of their immortal hopes. It is irrelevant to say that Tertullian, though a man of powerful intellect, had no faculty for literary criticism. Our contention is, not that he was a great literary critic, and that therefore we ought to accept his judgment on the authority and genuineness of the Four Gospels, but that he is a witness to the great place in the thought and the life of the Church which the Gospels held before the close of the second century. For this fact the evidence contained in his writings is decisive.[1]

[1] *See* Appendix, Note B.

LECTURE VIII

IRENÆUS

UNDER the reign of Marcus Aurelius—a philosopher among emperors, a saint among philosophers—the Christians suffered cruel persecution. The general policy of Rome was a policy of religious toleration; for, to quote the famous sentence of Gibbon, "the various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, and by the magistrates as equally useful." But from this toleration the Christian Faith, which maintained an incessant and open war against all the religions of the empire, was not unnaturally excluded. The hatred with which it was regarded was not always active, but it never ceased to exist. Under Marcus Aurelius it became furious.

He was one of the greatest and noblest of princes. He accepted the imperial dignity

with reluctance, and cared nothing for the splendours of his great position. Could he have chosen for himself, he would have spent his years in meditation on the mystery and glory of human life and on the ideal of human virtue. But the sentence of Plato was always on his lips, that states would be great and prosperous if their philosophers were princes, or if their princes were philosophers ; and he trusted that his own philosophical discipline had qualified him to render service to the immense populations which were under the Roman power.

The precepts which he set down for the conduct of his own life show that he saw the moral perils of his great position. "Take care," he writes, "that thou art not made into a Cæsar, that thou art not dyed with this dye ; for such things happen. Keep thyself then simple, good, pure, serious, free from affectation, a friend of justice, a worshipper of the gods, kind, affectionate, strenuous in all proper acts. Strive to continue to be such as philosophy wished to make thee. Reverence the gods and help men. Short is life. There is only one fruit of this earthly life, a pious disposition and social acts. Do everything as a disciple of Antoninus. Re-

member his constancy in every act which was conformable to reason, . . . and his sweetness, and his disregard of earthly fame, and his efforts to understand things; . . . and how he bore with them that blamed him unjustly without blaming them in return, how he did nothing in a hurry, and how he listened not to calumnies; . . . and with how little he was satisfied, such as lodging, bed, dress, food, servants; and how laborious [he was] and patient; . . . and how he tolerated freedom of speech in those who opposed his opinions; and the pleasure that he had when any man showed him anything better; and how religious he was without superstition. Imitate all this, that thou mayest have as good a conscience when thy last hour comes as he had." [1] His *Meditations*, which were written during his campaign on the Danube, sometimes touch the very confines of the morality illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount. Surely his vision of an ideal goodness was revealed to him by light from God. His personal character was not unworthy of his precepts. He was laborious, courageous, upright, kindly, and

[1] *The Thoughts of the Emperor M. Aurelius*, translated by George Long, pp. 123, 124.

magnanimous. And yet he persecuted the Christians.

To what extent he was personally responsible for the severities inflicted upon them has been disputed. During his reign the empire suffered grave calamities, and was menaced with still graver dangers. The public mind was agitated and alarmed. What were the causes of the earthquakes, pestilences, famines, which filled the Roman world with distress? By what invisible and hostile powers had the barbarians on the frontiers been excited to revolt? Was it possible that the gods were angry because the Christians had forsaken their temples, and were speaking of the ancient worship with fierce contempt? Popular terror may have demanded that the adherents of the new superstition should be sacrificed as a propitiation to the offended deities; and the emperor may have believed that it would be imprudent, perhaps impossible, to interfere for their protection. The Christians had suffered under Antoninus, whom he venerated as an example of philosophic virtue; and as the Christians were charged, not only with atheism, but with committing in secret the most horrible crimes, he may have thought

that they deserved to die. It is probable that he regarded with apprehension the political effects of this strange superstition; common worship was one of the strongest securities of the unity of the State; there was disloyalty to the empire in the refusal to take part in the public religious ceremonies. Whatever may be the explanation of his policy, "during the whole course of his reign," to quote the characteristic words of Gibbon, "Marcus despised the Christians as a philosopher, and punished them as a sovereign."

I

The persecution in southern Gaul (A.D. 177) seems to have begun in a tumultuous outbreak of popular passion. The general hatred with which the Christians were regarded had, for some unknown reasons, become so fierce, that their presence was not tolerated in the baths, the markets, or the public streets. When they appeared they were violently and brutally attacked; they were stoned and robbed. To bring the disorder to an end the local authorities intervened, and gave orders that the Christians should be imprisoned, and that on the arrival of the

governor of the province they should be put on their trial. A letter from "the servants of Christ dwelling in Lyons and Vienne in Gaul" to their "brethren in Asia and Phrygia" tells the story of the sufferings which the martyrs endured, first from the fury of the mob, and afterwards from the severities of the law. Nearly all the more zealous members of the two Churches were seized. To subdue their courage they were subjected to intolerable tortures. They were cruelly scourged. Some were compelled to sit on chairs of burning iron. Many died from the horrible treatment inflicted on them in prison. There were some whose constancy gave way under these persistent torments; but most of them showed a glorious fidelity. Those who declared their Roman citizenship were beheaded. The rest were flung to the wild beasts at the public games.

Among the martyrs that died in prison was Pothinus, bishop of Lyons. He was more than ninety years old, and was very infirm, partly from his great age, partly from disease. As he was being dragged away from the public tribunal, the crowd through which he passed struck him and kicked him, "showing no reverence to his age"; those who could not

reach him flung at him whatever they had in their hands, to avenge the injuries which he had done to their gods. The old man's strength was exhausted, and in two days he died.

Irenæus, a presbyter in the Church at Lyons, was elected his successor. He was a native of Asia Minor, and in his youth had lived in Smyrna, and had known Polycarp. Between the Churches of Asia Minor and the Churches in southern Gaul the relations were very intimate. It was from Asia Minor, in all probability, that Lyons and Vienne had received the Christian Gospel; and the Churches in Asia Minor would listen to the story of the courage and fidelity of the Christian martyrs in these two cities with the same kind of interest and gratitude and enthusiasm with which the Congregational Churches of England, thirty or forty years ago, listened to the story of the courage and fidelity of the Christian martyrs of Madagascar, who had first heard of the grace and glory of Christ from the lips of Congregational missionaries.

Even as a presbyter of the Church, Irenæus must have been a man of some distinction. In the early days of the persecution, his

brethren, who were suffering for their own faith, sent him to Rome to appeal to the sympathy of Eleutherus, at that time bishop of Rome, on behalf of the Montanists, who were suffering persecution in Asia Minor and Phrygia. When Irenæus became bishop, after the martyrdom of Pothinus, he showed great vigour. He was zealous for the conversion of the heathen; he was a resolute assailant of heresy; and he took an active part in the more important ecclesiastical affairs of his time.

II

His great work was a controversial treatise against Gnosticism, which was written in the early years of his episcopate, probably between A.D. 180 and A.D. 185. It is usually quoted under the short title, *Against Heresies*. He uses the books of the New Testament as freely as any modern theologian, and with the same reverence for their authority.

One of his testimonies to the Four Gospels I must give at length. He says:

"So firm is the ground on which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [documents], each one of them endeavours to establish his own peculiar

doctrine. For the Ebionites, who use Matthew's Gospel only, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord. But Marcion, mutilating that according to Luke, is proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those [passages] which he still retains. Those again who separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, preferring the Gospel of Mark, if they read it with a love of truth may have their errors rectified. Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John, . . . shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel. . . . Since then our opponents do bear testimony to us, and make use of these [documents], our proof derived from them is firm and true.

"It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the 'pillar and ground' of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life, it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. From which fact it is evident that the Word, the Artificer of all, He that sitteth upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit. As also David says, when entreating His manifestation, 'Thou that sittest between the cherubim, shine forth.' For the cherubim too were four-faced, and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God." [1]

[1] Irenæus: *Against Heresies* ("Ante-Nicene Library"), vol. i. pp. 292, 293.

The testimony to the four Gospels in this passage and in other parts of the writings of Irenæus is something very much more than the expression of the private opinion of a single Christian writer. He is expressing what he assumes to be the general judgment of those Christian Churches which claimed to inherit the apostolic faith. One heretical sect might appeal in support of its heresies to the Gospel of Matthew, another to the Gospel of Mark, another to the Gospel of Luke, another to the Gospel of John ; one of the sects might mutilate one Gospel, and another another : the Churches which were faithful to the apostolic tradition acknowledged the authority of all the Four, and had preserved them unmutilated. Irenæus was bishop of Lyons ; he had a right to speak for the Churches of southern Gaul. He had recently been sent on an important mission to Rome ; he must have known whether or not the Roman Church regarded all the Four Gospels with reverence, and believed that they were written by the men whose names they bear. He was born in Asia Minor, and there were intimate relations between the Churches of Asia Minor and the Churches of Gaul ; he had a right to speak for Asia Minor. His testimony is the testimony of the Churches of Asia Minor,

Rome, and southern Gaul. In the year A.D. 185, all these Churches held that our Four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This, indeed, is not disputed.

III

It has been alleged that the fanciful arguments by which Irenæus attempts to prove that there must be Four Gospels, and that there cannot be more than Four, deprive his testimony of all value. What weight, it has been asked, can be attached to a man's critical judgment who contends that, because there are four zones of the world, and because there are four principal winds, the north, the south, the east, and the west, and because there are four cherubim, there must be four authoritative narratives of the life of our Lord, and no more ? But the question has nothing to do with the critical judgment of Irenæus. The worth of his testimony does not rest upon his personal competence to determine whether the Four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but upon the opportunities which he had for knowing that this was the general belief of the Church in his time, and had been the general belief of the Church as long as he could remember.

He was an able man and a learned man; but, like other able and learned men of those days, he found parables and mysterious symbols where we find none. His logic, though often solid, is sometimes fanciful. But the mystical reasons which he alleges for there being Four Gospels, and only four, instead of lessening the force of his testimony, add immensely to its strength. Religious veneration, such as that with which he regarded these books, is of slow growth. They must have held a great place in the Church as far back as the memory of living men extended. They must have been transmitted to him and his contemporaries as a sacred treasure by the preceding generation.

IV

Further: Irenæus, as I have said, came from Asia Minor, and it was in Asia Minor that the Apostle John, who died about A.D. 100, had spent his last years. In A.D. 185 there must have been men still living in Smyrna and in Ephesus who had known intimately some of John's personal disciples and friends. Indeed, Irenæus himself, in his early youth, had listened to the teaching of Polycarp, and Polycarp had had "intercourse with John" and with others

" who had seen the Lord." There are several references to Polycarp in the great work of Irenæus on the *Heresies*, but the most interesting and instructive reference to him is in a remonstrance which he addressed to Florinus, who was one of his early friends, but had lapsed into heresy.[1] After saying that the present opinions of Florinus were not those which had been handed down to him by " the elders before us, who also were disciples of the apostles," Irenæus proceeds :

" For I saw thee, when I was still a boy in Lower Asia, in company with Polycarp, while thou wast faring prosperously in the royal court, and endeavouring to stand well with him. For I distinctly remember the incidents of that time better than events of recent occurrence ; for the lessons received in childhood, growing with the growth of the soul, become identified with it ; so that I can describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and his manner of life, and his personal appearance, and the discourses which he held before the people, and how he would describe his intercourse with John and with the rest who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their words. And whatsoever he had heard from them about the Lord, and about His

[1] The passage has been preserved by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book v. 20. The translation given in the text is by Dr. Lightfoot, and appears in his *Essays on the Work Entitled " Supernatural Religion,"* pp. 96, 97.

miracles, and about his teaching, Polycarp, as having received them from eye-witnesses of the life of the Word, would relate altogether in accordance with the Scriptures. To these [discourses] I used to listen at the time with attention, by God's mercy which was bestowed upon me, noting them down, not on paper, but in my heart ; and by the grace of God I constantly ruminate upon them faithfully."

We can imagine Irenæus—presbyter, bishop of Lyons—walking slowly and in deep meditation on the banks of the Rhone, and thinking of his early years when he listened to Polycarp in Smyrna. The face, the form, the voice of the saintly man who had died a martyr for Christ's sake came back to him. He could recall the reverence with which he had heard him speak of the disciple whom Jesus loved, and of other friends of the Lord whom he had known. The miracles of Christ which Polycarp had heard John describe, the discourses of Christ which Polycarp had heard John repeat, Polycarp's recollections of John's expositions of our Lord's words, Polycarp's accounts of what had been told him by other men who had been the friends of Christ during his earthly history—all these were to Irenæus a most precious and an imperishable possession. Those were his student days.[1] It was then that he

1 Irenæus says he was a "boy" when he heard

was preparing for his work as presbyter and bishop. What he had heard from Polycarp was a sacred trust ; he was under solemn obligations to be faithful to it.

Is it probable, is it possible, that Irenæus would have acknowledged the genuineness and authority of a Gospel said to have been written by John if he had never heard Polycarp speak of it ? It is certain that, when he heard Polycarp, John had been dead for many years ; if at that time Polycarp, John's disciple, had known nothing of any Gospel that John had written, had never spoken of it, I cannot believe that Irenæus would ever have been induced to receive the Fourth Gospel as having been written by Polycarp's master and friend.

V

Irenæus had received traditions concerning our Lord from other " elders " who had known the original apostles. He had also received traditions from some who had been the friends

Polycarp ; he does not mean that he was a mere child. Mr. Venables, in his article on Irenæus in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. iii., p. 254, cols. 1, 2, argues that the age of a " boy "—as Irenæus uses the word—began about the eighteenth year.

of men who had known the original apostles. These traditions are indeed not always trustworthy. Some of the "elders" whom Irenæus knew or from whom he quotes may have misunderstood what they heard from an apostle or from a friend of an apostle; or may, in later years, have confused what they heard with their own inferences from it.

Even Polycarp's recollections of the precise words which he had heard from John might not always have been perfectly accurate; he might have mistaken their meaning when he first heard them; with the lapse of years phrases, sentences, lodged in his memory might have been moulded into new forms by the ebb and flow of his own thoughts, as stones lying on the beach are rounded and polished by the ebb and flow of the tide. Traditions of what the apostles *said*, even when they are reported by men who were the immediate disciples of the apostles, cannot command an unqualified confidence. They require collateral support. Still less can they command an unqualified confidence when they are reported by men who did not themselves hear the apostles, although the tradition may have come to them from men whose intercourse with the apostles had been intimate and had extended over many years.

But, if the question at issue is whether a Gospel bearing the name of John contains an account of our Lord, identical in substance with that which John was accustomed to give to his disciples, then the evidence of the disciples of John and of their disciples is of great and irresistible strength. If they accept the Gospel, if they offer no protest against its genuineness, I, for my part, am compelled to believe that he wrote it.

And this is the real question at issue. For those who contest the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel assert that it contains an account of our Lord wholly different from that which John would have given had he written a Gospel at all; that its conception of Jesus of Nazareth, as the eternal Word who had become flesh to reveal the Father and to save the world, is rooted in philosophical speculations on the nature and being of God, wholly alien from the thought of the fisherman of Galilee, who was an unlearned man; that its spiritual freedom is inconsistent with the religious position of John, who was an apostle of the circumcision, and who, it is maintained, regarded Paul's revolt against Judaism with stern hostility; that what are described as the simple ethical discourses contained in the first

three Gospels represent the real character of our Lord's teaching, and that therefore none of His original apostles could have attributed to Him the mystical and dogmatic discourses contained in the fourth. In other words, it is contended, not only that John did not write the Gospel which bears his name, but that he could not have written it, since it contains a theory of our Lord's Person and an account of our Lord's teaching such as John himself could never have given to his disciples.

The contention is an impossible one. If the representation of our Lord and of our Lord's teaching in the Fourth Gospel had been wholly different from that which John had given during his lifetime, neither John's friends nor the disciples of John's friends would have allowed it to have been accepted as genuine.

Suppose that Dr. Pusey had never published any books, or tracts, or sermons during his life, but had taught his characteristic doctrines concerning the Church, the Priesthood, and the Sacraments to successive generations of Oxford students. He died in 1882. Suppose that early in the next century, twenty years after his death, or even thirty or forty, a treatise were to appear, bearing his name, which assailed with elaborate argument the whole theory of

Episcopacy, and maintained that every separate congregation of devout men and women is, according to the idea of Christ, a true Church, under Christ's immediate government, and with powers derived from Christ's presence to appoint its own ministers and to exercise discipline ; suppose that this treatise, attributed to Dr. Pusey, contained a vigorous attack on the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration and the Real Presence in the Eucharist, and defended the Zuinglian theory of the Sacraments : is it credible that, while men were still living who had been Dr. Pusey's students at Oxford, this treatise would be received as genuine ? is it credible that it would be received as genuine while men were still living who had derived their ecclesiastical and sacramental beliefs from Dr. Pusey's students ? Would there be no protest, no controversy ?

But the theory which denies that John could have written the Fourth Gospel requires us to believe something quite as incredible. For, according to this theory, the doctrinal teaching of the Fourth Gospel is as irreconcilable with what it is alleged the doctrinal teaching of John must have been, as the ecclesiastical and sacramental teaching of the imaginary treatise, published after Dr. Pusey's death, with Dr.

Pusey's ecclesiastical and sacramental teaching during his life. And yet there is no trace of any protest against the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel on the part of the men who had known John for many years and who had loved and reverenced him ; and it is certain that scholars and bishops who were the friends of John's friends, and had received from them the tradition of his sanctity and of his teaching, believed that the Fourth Gospel contains an authentic account of our Lord's ministry, and that John wrote it. For me this, at least, is absolutely certain, that the representation of our Lord and of His teaching given in the Fourth Gospel is identical in substance with that which the Churches of Asia had heard from John's own lips.

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